VOL. LXXIX
FEBRUARY 1974

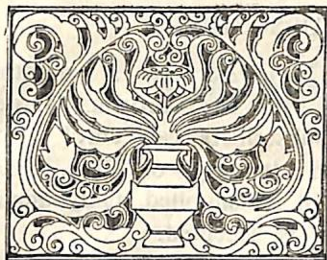
Prabuddha Bharata

OR

AWAKENED INDIA



ADVAITA ASHRAMA, MAYAVATI
HIMALAYAS



Editorial Office

P.O. Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P.

Publication Office

5 Dehi Entally Road
Calcutta 700-014
Phone: 44-2898



Annual Subscription

India, Nepal, Bangladesh,
& Sri Lanka Rs 8
U.S.A. $ 4.00
Other Countries £ 1.00

Life Subscription

Rs 150 $ 100 £ 20

Single Copy

75 P. 35 cents. 10 P

Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

FEBRUARY 1974

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Cover:
Chauren Himal, Central Himalayas, Nepal.

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PRABUDDHA BHARATA
P.O. Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
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SWAMI SANTANANDAJI
Mahasamadhi on 21st January 1974
(Obituary appears on page 80)



Prabuddha Bharata

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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the Goal is reached.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA ANSWERS

Question (posed by himself): 'Do you know why God incarnates Himself as a man ?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'It is because through a human body one can hear His words. He sports through it. He tastes divine bliss through a human body. But through His other devotees, God manifests only a small part of Himself. A devotee is like something you get a little juice from after much sucking—like a flower you get a drop of honey from after much sucking.'

Question (posed by himself): 'But what am I ?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'It is all He. I am the machine and He is its Operator. It is God alone who exists in this [meaning his body]. That is why so many people are feeling more and more attracted to it. A mere touch is enough to awaken their spirituality. This attraction, this pull, is the attraction of God and of none else.

'Tarak of Belgharia was going home from Dakshineswar. I clearly noticed that a flame-like thing came out of this [meaning his body] and followed him. A few days later Tarak came back to Dakshineswar. In a state of samadhi He who dwells in this body placed His foot on Tarak's chest.

'Well, are there more youngsters like these ?'

M: 'Mohit is very nice. He came to you once or twice. He is studying enough books to pass two university examinations. He has great longing for God.'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'That may be. But he doesn't belong to a high plane. His physical traits are not so good ; he has a puggish face. But these other youngsters belong to a high plane.

'Many troubles and worries follow in the wake of a birth in a physical body. Further, if a person is cursed, he may have to be born seven times. One must be very careful. One has to assume a human body if one cherishes the slightest desire.'

Question (asked by a devotee): 'What are the desires of those who are Incarnations of God ?'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): 'I find that I have not got rid of my desires. Once I saw a holy man with a shawl, and I too wanted to put on one like it. Even now I have that desire. I don't know whether I shall have to be born again for it.'

Balaram (smiling): 'Then will you be born again just for a shawl?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'One has to keep a good desire so that one may give up the body meditating on it. There are four holy places for the sadhus to visit. They visit three and leave out one. Many of them leave out Puri, the place of Jagannath, so that they can give up their bodies meditating on Jagannath.'

Question (asked by Dr. Sarkar): 'But can one retain Perfect Knowledge permanently? You say that all is God. Then why have you taken up this profession of a paramahamsa? And why do these people attend on you? Why don't you keep silent?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Water is water whether it is still or moves or breaks into waves.

'I must tell you something else. Why should I not listen to the "mahut Narayana"? The guru had taught his disciple that everything was Narayana. A mad elephant was coming toward the disciple, but he did not move away since he believed the guru's words. He thought that the elephant was Narayana. The mahut shouted to him: "Get away! Get away!" But the disciple did not move. The elephant picked him up and threw him to the ground. The disciple was not quite dead; when his face was sprinkled with water he regained consciousness. Being asked why he had not moved away, he said: "Why should I? The guru said, 'Everything is Narayana.'" "But, my child," said the Guru, "why didn't you listen to the words of the mahut Narayana?"

'It is God who dwells within as the Pure Mind and Pure Intelligence. I am the machine and He is its Operator. I am the house and He is the Indweller. It is God who is the mahut Narayana.'

Doctor: 'Let me ask you something. Why do you ask me to cure your illness?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'I talk that way as long as I am conscious of the "jar" of the "ego". Think of a vast ocean filled with water on all sides. A jar is immersed in it. There is water both inside and outside the jar; but the water does not become one unless the jar is broken. It is God who has kept this "jar" of the "ego" in me.'

ONWARD FOR EVER!

In place of ancient superstitions they have erected modern superstitions, in place of the old Popes of religion they have installed modern Popes of science. So we see that this objection as to memory is not valid, and that is about the only serious objection that is raised against this theory [of reincarnation]. Although we have seen that it is not necessary for the theory that there shall be the memory of past lives, yet at the same time we are in a position to assert that there are instances which show that this memory does come, and that each one of us will get back this memory in that life in which he will become free. Then alone you will find that this world is but a dream; then alone you will realize in the soul of your soul that you are but actors and the world is a stage; then alone will the idea of non-attachment come to you with the power of thunder; then all this thirst for enjoyment, this clinging on to life and this world will vanish for ever; then the mind will see clearly as daylight how many times all these existed for you, how many millions of times you had fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, relatives and friends, wealth and power. They came and went. How many times you were on the topmost crest of the wave, and how many times you were down at the bottom of despair! When memory will bring all these to you, then alone will you stand as a hero.

Vivekananda

OF THE MIND THAT IS AN UNFLICKERING LAMP

EDITORIAL

In one of the most inspiring discourses in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, set with profound psychological and yogic insights, Śrī Kṛṣṇa uses this simile—'As a lamp in a windless place does not flicker'—to impress upon Arjuna the nature of the highest state of realization that a man of perfect meditation can experience. Sincere spiritual aspirants, on reading that part of the *Gītā*,[1] are sure to be stirred by the breathtaking description of joy and illumination that a meditative sage experiences. That stirring may not be merely an emotional response; the aspirants may zealously try to practise the steps to concentration and meditation that Śrī Kṛṣṇa delineates here. But like Arjuna, most of them will find to their utter chagrin that their minds are 'restless, turbulent, powerful, and obstinate'[2]—utterly uncontrollable. What to speak of getting that state of mind which is like a lamp in a windless place, they are more likely to feel that all the well-known hurricanes and cyclones blowing on land and sea have somehow got into their skulls and are there trying to blow out the flame of concentration! Some of them may even conclude that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was playing fast and loose with Arjuna's faith and devotion!

But the fact is completely to the contrary. Our minds are always storm-swept. Only we are not aware of this. What is generally considered to be deep concentration or close-knit logical thinking is neither concentration nor thinking. In ninety-five out of a hundred persons the so-called thinking is like a loud factory siren out of a mental fog of sights and sounds, all disconnected and jumbled. The other five may have some amount of harmony and concentration in their thought-processes. Attempts at

[1] *Bhagavad-gītā*, VI. 10-32

[2] *ibid.*, VI. 34.

meditation as taught by Śrī Kṛṣṇa are likely to reveal to us by the way, the details of the mental fog with its innumerable bits of thoughts and sense-impressions flitting past at great speed. Becoming aware of this state of the mind is itself the first step in obtaining the exalted state of unflickering concentration.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa is neither naive nor playing with Arjuna's deep faith in Himself as Friend, Guide, and Goal. Before He speaks of the unflickering mind of a yogī, He, the great Lord of Yoga, lays down certain essential preconditions for its attainment. Much of our environmental disturbances can be avoided by the selection of a quiet spot and by remaining alone or in suitable, like-minded company. After thus pointing out how to shut off external 'winds', Kṛṣṇa focuses His attention on the internal ones which are of great consequence. For they are very subtle and rise from deeper levels. This He does in the following significant verse:

> 'Completely serene and fearless, steadfast in the vows of a *brahmacārin*, disciplined in mind, and ever thinking on Me, he should sit in yoga, regarding Me as his Supreme Goal.' [3]

Those who are familiar with the four *āśramas* or stages of life prescribed for Hindus, have some idea as to the stringency of the rules of discipline and conduct set down for the *brahmacārins* or celibate students. Almost all the moral and ethical codes of conduct prescribed by the fourfold discipline according to Vedānta (*sādhana-catuṣtaya*)[4] or the first two steps of Patañjali's yoga (*yama* and *niyama*) are covered by the 'vows of a *brahmacārin*' [5]. Growth in fearlessness and mental discipline are the natural concomitants of these vows. Steadiness in these will clear up most of our mental cacophony and bring about great inner order and harmony. Those who constantly complain of disturbed meditation should keep a close watch on the degree of steadiness they have been able to attain in these vows.

Though this steadiness will reduce the fury and haphazard blowing of the internal 'winds', it will not altogether stop them. There again Śrī Kṛṣṇa anticipates our needs. 'Ever thinking on Me' and 'regarding Me as his Supreme Goal' hold the key-hint for completely stilling those winds. 'Me' here should be understood as the ultimate Reality and desiring That alone, a practitioner of meditation is able to purify the whole subconscious and unconscious mind, obtain divine grace, and gradually shatter the body- and ego-consciousness. Then comes the stage when the mind tends to become flickerless and perception undistorted. Because the meditator regards the ultimate Reality as his Supreme Goal, he will not be tempted and deflected even by the appearance of the so-called occult psychic powers. With regular practice and careful avoidance of the mental obstacles of 'inactivity', 'distraction', 'middle state containing the seed of attachment', and 'tasting of happiness' (*laya, vikṣepa, kaṣāya,* and *rasāsvāda*),[6] the mind becomes steady like a flickerless lamp.

What Śrī Kṛṣṇa is describing here is the ultimate experience of Brahman or the supreme Reality.[7] It brings in its wake, supreme bliss, wisdom, and illumination. He who attains this conquers death and becomes a blessing to himself and the whole of creation.

Dhyāna or meditation is only the penultimate step to the state known as *samādhi*—the superconscious state where the mind

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[3] *ibid.*, VI. 14.

[4] Sadānanda: *Vedānta-sāra*, 15.

[5] These may also very well be practised by sincere householder aspirants.

[6] See *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā*, (*M.K.*), III. 44-5.

[7] See Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's commentary on *Bhagavad-gītā*, VI. 19; also *M.K.*, III. 46; and *Vedāntā-ṣāra*, 214.

ceases to function. Making the mind one-pointed is itself gaining half the battle. In meditation the mind loses its usual characteristics such as vacillation and distraction, and flows, as it were, in an uninterrupted stream of similar thought-waves. That means that even in *dhyāna* a slight flicker of the mind persists. At this stage there still reigns the threefold distinction of knower, knowing, and object of knowledge. With absolute purification of its *sattva* material, the mind begins to take on the very nature of the Self or Ātman which is the same as Brahman. That is why Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'The pure mind is the same as the pure Ātman.' Before this stage, the mind begins to lose its interest in objectivity. It is no more craving for 'creation', for duality. As Gauḍapāda insightfully remarks, 'When the mind, after realizing the knowledge that the Ātman alone is real, becomes free from imaginations and therefore does not cognize anything—for want of objects to be cognized—it ceases to be the mind.'[8]

Vedāntic scriptures and teachers are unanimous in their opinion that the faculties of intelligence, cognition, reflection, etc. do not inhere in the mind but are borrowed by it from the self-luminous Ātman. This is one of the facts that deep meditation reveals to its practitioners—the objectivity of thoughts and emotions, and their progenitor the mind with all its layers. Even introspection, which is made much of in the West, is a very low state compared to real *dhyāna*. When the mind is absolutely purified and trained to dwell constantly in the Ātman, it becomes a perfect reflector of the truth of the ultimate Reality,[9] or a powerful lamp dispelling all ignorance about it.[10]

For some years past a great amount of interest has been shown in the peculiar experiences brought on by psychedelic drugs. Some persons have even spoken of mysticism in the same breath with psychedelic experiences. But let no genuine spiritual aspirant be deceived by such paltering with truth. While drug-induced experiences are distortions of sense-perceptions and sense-impressions, mystical or religious experiences are revelations of a truth that is ordinarily distorted by the space-time phenomena. Drugs enslave us to themselves and to the world of relativity; religious experiences give us self-mastery and finally liberation from all bondages of relative existence, including death. Drugs in the long run shatter our body and mind and make us utterly miserable; meditation and religious realizations make for the finest of physical and mental health, ineffable joy, and shadowless illumination.

Furthermore there is lately a lot of fussing and promotional activity regarding the brain-wave-measuring electronic appliances. Much wide-eyed talking on detection and induction of alpha waves and theta-experience is going on in some quarters. It is even claimed that practitioners of Zen and Yoga meditation need not take all that trouble to struggle a lifetime—some even resorting to mountain-tops—for spiritual experiences. 'Wired to E.E.G. machines and other monitoring devices, they demonstrated that they could voluntarily produce trance states . . . raise and lower blood pressure, slow heart rates, control pain and blood flow.'[11] All this has no meaning in the eyes of the Vedāntic teachers and students, who aim at direct and immediate realization (*aparokṣānubhūti*) of the abso-

[8] *M.K.*, III. 32.

[9] *Kaṭha-upaniṣad*, VI. 5.

[10] See *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad*, II. 16; also *Gītā*, XIII. 24; and *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, XI.14.45.

[11] David Rorvik, 'The Theta Experience', *Saturday Review*, San Francisco, U.S.A., April 28, 1973. [Experimenter is allowed to 'watch' his own brain-wave activity and 'reinforce' that which is most conducive.]

lute Reality through control and purification of mind and gradual annihilation of mental modifications. The protagonists of 'electronic mysticism' may cover the whole gamut of known and unknown brain-waves from alpha to omega, and still be light-years away from that state of mind which Śrī Kṛṣṇa compares to the flickerless flame of a lamp. One of the 'Ten Best Things' recommended in 'The Precepts of the Gurus of Tibet' runs thus:

'For one of superior intellect, the best meditation is to remain in mental quiescence, the mind devoid of all thought-processes, knowing that the meditator, the object of meditation, and the act of meditating constitute one inseparable unity.'

Neither drug mysticism nor its electronic cousin can ever engender this 'best meditation'.

LETTERS OF A SAINT

The Lord My Refuge

Almora
21.4.16

Dear S—,

After a long time I got your letter yesterday and felt happy.... A few days before, I had received a letter from A—. It could not be answered because of my illness. Please tell this to A—. I am glad to know that they have all taken *sannyāsa* (monastic vows). I pray to the Lord that He may grant them the strength to keep those vows, thereby enabling them to become blessed in this human life. Otherwise it is not adequate to take *sannyāsa* only in name. *Sannyāsa* is a very difficult undertaking. The Master [Sri Ramakrishna] used to say that those alone are fit recipients of *sannyāsa* who can let themselves fall from a tree with a divine abandon, unconcerned about the fate of their limbs. This is not an easy task at all. Without complete resignation to God, it is not possible to do so.

All of you accept my sincere good wishes and love.

Your well-wisher,
Sri Turiyananda

Dear—,

... I get news of Bankura occasionally. There is great misery in that place—the Lord alone knows what His will is. But you have obtained an excellent opportunity to do the service of Nārāyaṇa (God) and become blessed. May you become blessed by serving the people with the fulness of your heart. Wherever you may be placed, you will be engaged in *nārāyaṇa-sevā* (service of Nārāyaṇa). Is this any small fortune? You have dedicated yourselves at the feet of the Lord. Remaining where the Lord pleases to keep you, if you can

lay down your life in doing solely His work, know then that you have achieved your goal. Don't desire to understand anything more than this. He is the sole refuge of all.

'Looking for Brahman is like seeking the smile of a buck-toothed man. My Mother, the Embodiment of Brahman, is present in all beings: at Her feet are Gayā, Gaṅgā, and Kāśī (all the holy places and rivers).'

There is no need to understand God—He is ever manifest. Just as the buck-toothed man need not smile—his teeth are already exposed.

Your well-wisher,
SRI TURIYANANDA

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE MODERN WORLD

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA

It seems rather difficult to connect Sri Ramakrishna with the modern world. He was born more than a century ago in a country where science and technology had not developed. His formal schooling did not go beyond that of the primary school. And too, mathematics, which is an important subject in science and technology, was a bugbear to him.

Then Sri Ramakrishna came to Dakshineswar, near Calcutta. His language revealed a rustic background. The Brahmos of the time said that it was not very refined. And as for his dress! Devendranath Tagore, an aristocrat and the father of Rabindranath Tagore, invited him to his Brahmo Samaj, but with the precondition that Sri Ramakrishna must come well dressed. Of course Sri Ramakrishna refused, and the invitation was withdrawn.

Another Brahmo leader, Sivanath Sastri, said that Sri Ramakrishna, being too much merged in the thought of God, had lost his balance of mind, that too much thinking of God had made him lose his head. As for the generality of Hindus of that age, they respected Sri Ramakrishna and revered him as a saint, but at the same time they also said that so far as worldly affairs were concerned 'he is mad'! So what can *we* expect from such a saint in the modern age?

As against that, we may point out that Jesus Christ and some other great souls were born in similar environments, and yet their influence, their inspiration, are as strong today as ages ago. Even now they inspire people to form new societies and to make endeavours for new kinds of development. On that analogy, Sri Ramakrishna also can have some claim on modern minds. But that is not our subject here.

Sri Ramakrishna can speak to modern people in his own right, because, although he came from a village, although he was born in an under-developed country, his mind was in a way, very progressive, very modern. He said, 'The coins of the days of the Mussulman emperors and the nabobs cannot pass current today; the world has changed.'[1] If somebody is delirious with fever and you call in an old-time physician who depends on herbs and roots and,

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1 *vide*: Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, 1956), p. 333.

according to his prescription, you go on boiling them in water till the decoction comes out, then let it cool down, then mix it up and then administer it to the patient—by that time the patient will be dead! So today it is not herbs and roots that are necessary but some readily available, potent fever medicine. The world has changed.[2]

Sri Ramakrishna was very progressive. You may remember his parable of the holy man and the woodcutter.[3] A *brahmacārin* met a woodcutter and said, 'Go forward!' At first the woodcutter didn't understand, but when it dawned on him that the person was a holy man and that when he said something it must have meaning, the woodcutter did go forward, and he found a forest of sandalwood, very costly wood. He cut a few pieces of it, brought it and sold it in the market and became a rich man. He did not stop there. He proceeded farther. He came to a mine of silver, then a mine of gold, then a mine of diamonds. Sri Ramakrishna often used to repeat this story and ask his devotees to 'go forward'; they were ever to go forward.

Modern in life and thought, he visited the modern theatre, he went to see how a balloon is sent up, and he visited many institutions which were the creations of modern civilization. He appreciated them.

Although the Divine Mother had promised him that many pure-souled devotees would come to him, with whom he would be able to talk about God, they were slow to appear. So, in despair he went up to the roof and called out to them, 'Where are you all? Do come!'

First came the Brahmo devotees. They talked in a strange way, unfamiliar to Sri Ramakrishna. He went to his Mother Kālī and said, 'Mother, what is this?' And the Mother replied, 'Well, things will happen like that in the Kali-yuga, in the iron age. You have to live with them.' He agreed to live with them, talk with them, mix with them, to the extent that when one Nepali gentleman, Vishwanath Upadhyaya, criticized him by asking: 'Why do you go to Keshabchandra Sen? [Keshab had been to the West, to England, and had eaten many forbidden things; he had lost his caste.] Why should you go to him?'—Sri Ramakrishna replied: 'But you, a *brāhmaṇa*, can go to the Viceroy and the Governor who are non-*brāhmaṇas*, even non-Hindus? You mix with them for what? For money. I go to Keshab to talk about God. What fault is there?'[4] So he was modern. He mixed with them all.

Then came some other devotees. The Brahmo devotees could not accept Sri Ramakrishna wholly and fully; they thought he was just a good man living a holy life, nothing more than that. They did not find anything new in his message which could be put into action for the good of mankind. And there came other Hindu gentlemen who wanted to understand Sri Ramakrishna in terms of their own backgrounds, of what they knew about the old saints and prophets. They too failed to find any novelty in his message.

So Sri Ramakrishna wanted to meet 'young Bengal', the newly-educated young people, who had fresh minds and fresh energy, who could understand him with open minds and put his message into action. He wanted them. He was a modern man.

Still, he was not willing to accept everything modern without question. Science in the first flush of its machine-age success thought that it could very well take care of the world, and God could be disposed of. But then, they had not even discovered many things which we now know: there

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[2] *vide*: Swami Nikhilananda: *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, 1947), p. 72.

[3] *vide*: ibid., p. 35.

[4] *vide*: ibid., p. 621.

were some hypotheses only, and those hypotheses they passed off as scientific truths, based on the uniformity of nature.

There was Mathurnath Biswas, one of the proprietors of the Dakshineswar Temple. Mathur had a modern education. He talked a little scientifically, and he argued with Sri Ramakrishna. But Sri Ramakrishna once brought from the garden a twig of hibiscus on which were one red flower and one white, put it before Mathur, and said, 'Now, what about your uniformity of nature? How do you explain this?'[5] Well, science *may* explain this. Also science may explain another incident Sri Ramakrishna mentioned, that 'Although the scientists talk of lightning striking only the tallest building in an area, I have seen a cottage burning just near a high brick building. How do you explain that?'[6] What he was hinting at was that you should not run away with these hasty generalizations and think God has no place in this world: this is all wrong. But that was how they thought in those days. Nowadays all that is very much changed. Scientists generally do not talk that way. They confine themselves largely to their own field, leaving the field of religion to others.

Then again there have been others, also passing as scientists, who have deluded people in many other ways. Take, for instance, Freud. Psychoanalysts would tell you that humans are basically beastly, full of evil tendencies that masquerade under decent ideas and supply the motive power for all action. That was Freud's idea—that men are basically beasts. Then came the Marxists who said that the motive power for society was money, greed. Society was moved by economic considerations and nothing else. So, between them—the psychoanalysts and the communists—they divided the world: all humans were to be treated as beasts, and human society was just a pawn in the hands of the moneyed classes, of vested interests.

But here comes Sri Ramakrishna as a protest against both these, and he says: 'The world is not really progressing through money and all these beastly considerations. Men are basically divine; they are moved by divine considerations, divine inspiration.' There *is* the world. There *is* Brahman. But lust and lucre come and deflect or pervert our vision. We may quote from the Upaniṣads, though we are applying it in another sense: 'By the golden vessel is the face of truth covered up.'[7] When we run after lust and lucre we don't get truth as such. Everything becomes distorted by our hankering for gold and an enjoyable life in this world.

People talk of māyā—that the world does not really exist. I am not concerned with metaphysical questions, nor was Sri Ramakrishna much concerned. But he was very much concerned with the behaviour of men, whom he found motivated by this lust and lucre. Through their prepossessions, men form their own worlds, superimpose them on Brahman and this world; then misread the whole thing and create trouble for themselves.

As I told you, Sivanath Sastri criticized Sri Ramakrishna, that he had lost his head by thinking too much of God. And what was the latter's retort? 'Can anyone ever become unconscious by thinking of Consciousness? God is of the nature of Eternity, Purity, and Consciousness. Through His Consciousness one becomes conscious of everything; through His Intelligence the whole world appears intelligent.'[8] Sri Ramakrishna saw that it was

[5] *vide*: *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, Himalayas, 1964), p. 87.

[6] *vide*: Saradananda: *op. cit.*, p. 589.

[7] *Īśā-upaniṣad*, 15.

[8] *Gospel*, pp. 582-3.

not religion that leads one astray, but rather, lust and lucre.

As I have been saying here and elsewhere, we form societies, such as the League of Nations and the United Nations—for what? For improving the world, making the world better for human living. And what do we do with them? Our selfish considerations deflect our views. We run after things that will be beneficial to our own nations, our own societies, to ourselves, and never think of the world as a whole, never think of others as beings like ourselves, who deserve our consideration. Never do we do that.

Strange it is that this poor man, coming from an out-of-the-way village, could declare as in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: 'There are two things in this world. One is *dayā* (compassion) and another is māyā. Māyā is selfish love for one's own.' He goes further and says: 'Even loving one's own countrymen is māyā. But loving the whole of humanity, loving the citizens of all countries, is *dayā*: active sympathy for others, brotherliness towards others, helpfulness to others.'[9]

That is how Sri Ramakrishna talked. Would you not call him a modern man? Perhaps much more—better than that! Much more progressive than modern men are. I have been telling you that he considered men not as so many beasts, so many creatures made of only bone, flesh and blood; not as mere working animals or even thinking animals. He considered them to be none other than God in so many forms. In the Upaniṣads we read: 'Thou art woman, Thou art man; Thou art youth and maiden too. Thou as an old man totterest along on a staff; it is Thou alone who, when born, assumest diverse forms.'[10] It was God whom Sri Ramakrishna thus saw in everything.

There was one Hazra who criticized Sri Ramakrishna, saying, 'You are a saint, a *paramahaṁsa*. You should remain merged in *samādhi*, absorbed in God. Why do you think of these youngsters—Naren, Rakhal and others—who are not even *brāhmaṇas* but *kṣattriya* boys, lower in caste?'[11] Again, he and others said, 'You think of these young men with the hope of getting some help from them.'

Sri Ramakrishna was very much perplexed. He was so very simple—like a child. He went to the Mother of the Universe, to Kālī in the temple, and said, 'Here are the people criticizing me like that. What do you say to that?' And the reply came, 'You love Naren and Rakhal not because they are rich or young people, not because they are learned, but because you see Nārāyana, God, in them.' Sri Ramakrishna returned assured and consoled.

One of the critics was Naren himself. Sri Ramakrishna returned from the temple and told Naren, 'You rogue! You have been misleading me. I love you not because you are Naren or a young man, but because I see Nārāyaṇa in you. The day I shall cease to see Nārāyaṇa in you, I shall not be able to look at your face even.'[12] And to others he said, 'You say that I love these young boys to get something out of them. What can Naren give me, please? He has not a torn mat to spread for me to sit down. (So poor had Naren and his family become after his father's death that he had not even a simple meal every day.) So what do I expect from them! I see Nārāyaṇa in them. Therefore do I love them, therefore do I talk with them.'

And this was no mere talk, I tell you, of 'seeing Nārāyaṇa'. It was a matter of realization. It was not dry philosophy, got from reading different books or from talking

[9] *vide*: ibid., p. 409.
[10] *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad*, IV. 3.
[11] *vide*: Saradananda: *op. cit.*, p. 616.
[12] *vide*: ibid., p. 617.

with big intellectuals. Nārāyaṇa was the reality that Sri Ramakrishna saw, realized in his own life. Then only did he talk.

Take the example of those two boatmen quarrelling on the Gaṅgā. Sri Ramakrishna's room faced the river and he could easily see them. The boatmen started fighting, and one of them slapped the other very smartly on the back. Sri Ramakrishna cried out in pain. A little later came Hriday, his attendant and his nephew, and he said, 'Uncle, who has beaten you like that? I see red finger marks on your back.' Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'Nobody has done it. But when those boatmen were quarrelling, I felt as though I myself had been beaten.'[13] That is seeing God everywhere. That is becoming identified with God everywhere. That was Sri Ramakrishna's realization. And he spoke from that realization only and not as a philosopher, not as an intellectual. He saw, he realized it—that Brahman is everywhere.

Somebody was walking over the lawn, and Sri Ramakrishna asked his attendant, 'Go stop him! I feel as though he were walking over my chest.'[14] It was not a rich man's lawn either: just some newly-grown panic grass (*dūrvā*) near the Kālī Temple at Dakshineswar; still he felt like that. That is seeing God everywhere. And he talked about this Nārāyaṇa because he saw Nārāyaṇa in everyone. In his eyes, human dignity was very, very high. He saw everyone as Nārāyaṇa and he expected others to do so.

There was a gentleman, Mahimacharan Chakravarty, who now and then fed the poor. One day he came to Ramakrishna. Not mentioning the fact directly, Sri Ramakrishna spoke of the realization that should inspire such feeding. He said to Mahima, 'When feeding people one should think that one is pouring oblations into the very mouth of God.' He was filling in a sort of lacuna in Mahima's life. At another time Sri Ramakrishna asked a rather Europeanized gentleman, 'What is the purpose of life? What do you want to do?' 'Sir, I want to do good to the world.' 'Doing good to the world? How big is the world, sir? And how puny are you! Can you really do any good to the world? You can serve it. You can serve the Narayana that is in the world. . . .'[15]

That was giving a new turn to service, to 'doing good to the world'. To others also he often spoke like that, and corrected some wrong views that most of us still have. What are these? There was Sambhunath Mallick, who told Sri Ramakrishna, 'Sir, I have some money and want to spend it for starting some schools and hospitals.' 'What! Starting schools and hospitals? What is the purpose of life, please? If God comes to you, would you ask God for hospitals and schools, or for devotion to His lotus feet? What is the purpose of life?'[16]

Still, Sri Ramakrishna himself also said, 'It is good to do charity. It is a very good thing, a good use of money, and if moneyed people don't use their money for such a purpose, I would say fie on them.'[17]

He wanted money to be well spent, but that people should not forget the real purpose of life. Just this morning I was reading in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, that Mahendranath Sarkar (the physician who treated Sri Ramakrishna) came wanting to do some good to others, and 'M' (writer of the *Gospel*) told him, 'Sir, if you came to the Kālī Temple and, before seeing the Mother, went on distributing doles to the beggars, when would you see Her?'[18] So this is the thing that matters most.

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13 *vide*: ibid., p. 262.

14 *vide*: ibid., p. 261.

15 *vide*: *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 313-4.

16 *vide*: *Gospel*, p. 71.

17 *vide*: ibid., p. 226.

18 *vide*: ibid., p. 836.

Nowadays we are thinking of improving the world, bettering it, but we are forgetting God altogether. As Swami Vivekananda said, 'Is religion only a form of municipal activity? Just cleaning the streets, having them well-lighted, and putting up fine buildings? Should religion end in that alone? Or should there be some direct contact with God?'

Sri Ramakrishna had it. He realized God and taught society that God must be placed before everything else. Do all kinds of charity, have all other things that you want for the good of society or even for your family or yourself, but when you forget God and run after these things only, you are misusing human life. Śaṅkara says:

> 'These are three things which are rare indeed and are due to the grace of God—namely, a human birth, the longing for Liberation, and the protecting care of a perfected sage.'[19]

We have got the human life. We have also got opportunities to approach great souls. We also have some amount of hankering for God-realization. Let us not be deflected from our purpose in life by these small considerations. Not, I repeat again, that we should not do good to others or do good to the world according to our capacity, but I maintain that it will not do to run after these things only, for name and fame, which may often creep in unknowingly. I may be doing good work, very good work, using my money in a good way. But somehow this hankering for name and fame, for becoming well known, becoming a big man in society, may creep in and make me forget God. Sri Ramakrishna cautioned us about that, that always we must remember God, and then God alone will be at the basis of all our action. When we forget God, all else is nothing.

Yet through all this, Sri Ramakrishna was still modern. He said, 'In this Kali-yuga I find people's minds are preoccupied with means of getting food.' He was talking in India where poverty is rampant; he was not talking in America. But if he were talking in America, perhaps he would say, 'We have been multiplying our wants so much and we are so very busy fulfilling these wants that we have no leisure to think of God.'

So what is the way out? It won't do simply to say, 'Don't run after these wants, don't try to get food.' As Sri Ramakrishna said, long before Karl Marx, 'Empty stomachs and religion go ill together.' People must have food. Their minimum wants have to be supplied; otherwise they can't apply their minds to God.

So, how did Ramakrishna help us in this predicament? Well, he, Swamiji [Vivekananda], and others of the modern age knew that people must be taken just where they are, just as they are, and they must be helped to think of God under any circumstance. All cannot be placed in ideal circumstances. That is an impossibility. So, being a modern man, Sri Ramakrishna often said, 'The rites and rituals and duties that are prescribed by the Vedas cannot all be practised in this modern age.' Then what? He said:

'You have to live in the world with your families. Then just change your outlook. Don't think that it is your family, your children, but rather think of them as a trust placed in your hands by God. You are doing God's work by feeding them, by serving them. You are just a servant.'

To give you a more concrete example: To Sri Ramakrishna comes an old widow of the Mallick family, and she says, 'Sir, when I sit in meditation, my mind does not become concentrated.' Now look at the fun! An old widow, coming to a saint and saying that her mind cannot be concentrated. And to whom does it go? To

[19] *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 3

her brother's little son ! Would not a saint just dismiss her, saying, 'What a funny old lady are you, talking to me like that ! Why should your mind go to a child and not to God ? ' But no. It was Sri Ramakrishna of the modern age, and he said to her, 'Very good, if your mind goes to that child, think of that child as the little "Bālagopāla"; as the Boy Kṛṣṇa who has come to you in that form.'

The lady accepted the instruction, began to think like that, and through that boy did realize Śrī Kṛṣṇa in her life.[20] That is the new lesson, the new outlook, that Sri Ramakrishna places before us. We have to live in the world as ordinary citizens, but then Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Don't you forget God. If you are to break a jackfruit which has got sticky juice, then what to do ? Just smear your hands with oil and then break it ; the juice will not stick to your skin.'

So first get some idea, some deep faith, some conceptions about God, then do your duties in the world. Let the boat float on water, but let not water get into the boat. Live in the world like the lotus leaf, which floats on the water but not a drop of water can cling to it. We are serving God by serving our families and serving our nation and serving our fellowmen. It is God for whom we have been born in this world. It is for God that we live. That must remain predominantly in our mind everywhere and every time. Then only is life meaningful, not otherwise. It is the lesson that Sri Ramakrishna teaches us. There are other lessons also.

How can human beings really be brotherly, really live in peace ? The hint has already been given to you. If we think of them, of all of them as nothing but manifestations of God, then only there can be real brotherliness, not otherwise. If we think of people as black and white, intelligent and non-intelligent, or something like that, all questions of exploitation, all questions, of using people for our own purposes will come in. Even the idea that they are God's people, will not take us very far. Because 'God' will be my God, the way that *I* think of God ; and God's children will be those people who stick to *my* God alone and not to others' Gods. If we are to deal with humanity as a whole, if we are to expand our sympathies all over the world, then we have to think of some God—or rather of Brahman—that comprises everything, that is everywhere and lives through everybody. That idea of equality through the perception of divinity in all, can really bring peace to this world.

People say, 'Sometimes we are afraid of religion ; religion brings conflicts.' Well, what does not bring conflicts, please ? Do not economic considerations, does not politics, do not other geographical considerations also bring in fight and conflict ? Why then blame only religion ?

I give the example of the newly-created Bangladesh: It was all Pakistan. Mussulmans separated from India forming Pakistan, to live as better Mussulmans. Bangladesh was predominantly Mussulman, perhaps 80 per cent if not more, and Western Pakistan is all Mussulman. Why did they divide ? Why did they separate ? And why did the Western Pakistanis commit murder and brutality and arson in Bangladesh ? It was not for religion. It was for something else. It is selfishness that really rules the world, that really spoils the world, and not religion.

And they say, 'You can live better by giving up religion.' Well, don't you find that in America you improve along with your religion ? Did not the ancient world, India and Greece and Rome, progress along with their religions ? It is all false philosophy, all false theories that are being thrust on us by designing people, by designing and

20 *Saradananda* : *op. cit.*, p. 343.

misleading politicians. It is not religion that spoils people. Religion is meant for bettering people, for improving their minds and making society a better place to live in. Religion stands for morality. Religion stands for God-realization. How can it make people worse? It is all false philosophy taught in the name of religion. That is all there's to it.

Then again, I would say that we as human beings have our own aptitudes. We have our own capacities, have our own sentiments. Would you bring us all together under the same canopy and make us live the same life, all of us? Well, that is just not possible. It never can be. We talk of some sort of democracy in religion—that all will move in a certain way, dress in a certain way, go to a certain church at a certain time, and pray in the very same way. At the same time, when prayer is going on where are their minds, please? Somewhere in the play-ground, maybe? Somewhere in their family maybe? Are they all meditating? Are they all praying? Well, it cannot be. That sort of democracy will lead us no-where. Democracy cannot be a thing for religion to take up. You can't fit the same coat on Tom, Dick, and Harry. Each one has to have his own choice. It is said in one of the hymns to Śiva:

> 'People have different tastes. And according to their different tastes, they call on God in their different ways. Just like rivers flowing into the same sea, people in spite of the differences in their tastes, do all come to God.'[21]

That is the idea of harmony preached by Sri Ramakrishna. Again I say, not as a philosophy, not as an intellectual thing got by reading books, or cogitating on the matter, but it is a felt reality, it is a realized truth that he places before us. He had practised the different religions and found that they all lead to the same goal, to the same God. He had seen it, he had realized it, and then only he talked. And it was not *he* who talked, mind you. Again and again he says: 'It is not I. I am just an instrument in the hands of my Mother. It is the Mother talking through me. It is the Mother who has revealed this idea of harmony, of living together in spite of our differences.'

In politics nowadays they talk of coexistence. They have coined a word and are trying to adopt it. It is a good thing. But they are failing just because of their selfish considerations, just because of their petty politics. If they meant real coexistence, as they declare, well, that would be a practical application of this theory of harmony that Sri Ramakrishna has taught us. It is through this alone, through unity in spite of diversities, through unity in diversities that we can really pave the way for peace in the world. Sri Ramakrishna has taught us these things.

But he has also taught us another thing, and it is this: When you want to be religious, then be sincere, be earnest, be diligent. It won't do to live on the surface and just talk about these things.

Sri Ramakrishna once went to the Samāj, to the society of Keshab Chandra Sen. Keshab was delivering a sermon and he said, 'God, please grant us this: that we may dive deep into the current of devotion, never to come out again.' Sri Ramakrishna heard it and then in his humorous way he said: 'Look here, Keshab! If you dive deep and never come out, then what will happen to those ladies behind the screen? (In those days our womenfolk in India wouldn't come out before men. They lived mostly behind screens.) What will happen to them? So do one thing: you dive now and then, and come out now and then and mix with them. That way you can live.'[22]

(*Continued on p.* 57)

[21] Adapted from *Śiva-mahimnaḥ-stotram*, 7.

[22] *vide*: *Gospel*, p. 511.

PROFILES IN GREATNESS

JHANDU BHAT VITHALJI

[Swami Akhandananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the third President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, was one of the most widely travelled among the disciples. His book of reminiscences in Bengali —*Smṛtikathā*—has many pages devoted to his wanderings. He even penetrated into Tibet, which in the closing decades of the nineteenth century was very difficult and dangerous of access. His travelogue contains vivid portraits of persons with whom he came in contact and sometimes lived. Jhandu Bhat Vithalji, whose profile comes out inspiringly in the following extract form *Smṛtikathā*, lived in Jamnagar, in the present Gujarat State, India; and Swami Akhandananda became closely acquainted with him and lived with him, as well as with Seth Manishankar Vithalji (Sankarji Seth)—a very rich and pious businessman. The Swami lived and travelled in this area in 1891-92.—*Ed.*]

When I first visited Jamnagar in Gujarat State, Jhandu Bhatji was not there: he had gone elsewhere for treating his patients. After his return to Dhanwantarī Dhām (his home), I became acquainted with him. I had heard that Bhatji was a peerless giver.

A little before the time he began coming to me at Sankarji Seth's, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar had passed away and his biography had been published. Bhatji was importunately insistent on getting a copy of the book and gave me the money for it. When it arrived he used to come daily to Sethji's house to listen to its reading. Whenever he heard of any of Vidyasagar's benevolent deeds, he would burst into tears.

At Junagad, Swamiji (Vivekananda) had come to be acquainted with Bhatji. There, on hearing the song, 'O ocean of compassion, Your ways are inscrutable. . .' sung by Swamiji, Bhatji had shed tears. Swamiji used to say: I have seen many places; I have seen many charitable persons. But nowhere have I seen such a compassionate person as Jhandu Bhat Vithalji.

Bhatji had practised yoga for some time, and led a strictly regulated life. There used to be no deviations in his food, answering calls of nature, etc. But one day while listening to the reading of Vidyasagar's life, the time for his evacuation passed by. There is a proverb, 'Yogīs are like *rogīs* (patients).' Because of that one day's irregularity, he fell ill and suffered for many days.

When I first went to Bhatji's house and saw it, I found it to be like a hospital. The home was full of patients—some coughing, some asthmatic, some febrile, etc. Arrangements for their treatment and diet were being made.

Bhatji used to rise at 4 a.m. and, after finishing his worship and devotions, used to sit outside. It was then that the people would come in groups, drink tea with him, and receive prescriptions. Bhatji however was not only giving prescriptions: at his outdoor dispensary he used to give free, even costly medicines to both rich and poor.

Following his routine, when it struck nine he would go out driving his tandem, and visit patients, but without charges. Once he went to treat the tuberculosis of Thakur Saheb of Woadhwan. I have heard it from many that when Bhatji was about to leave, the Thakur Saheb placed before him seven bags of one thousand rupees each. He said to Bhatji: 'I am not paying you any remuneration. That you couldn't do anything, I don't regret at all. This disease is incurable. I am only offering you some little money towards the cost of medicines you have given me.' Bhatji wailed aloud and replied: 'Our books say the patient won't die if the diagnosis is properly made. I couldn't determine the cause of your disease. Therefore, despite treating you, I couldn't do you any good. If today a Hindu king were ruling the country, I would have been punished. You are giving me a reward! How can I receive it?' Bhatji returned home grieving tearfully. He had by then debts of about a hundred thousand rupees. The Raja of Jamnagar wanted to pay up all his debts. But Bhatji would not take his help.

I heard another story. One day a brāhmaṇa came to Bhatji's for alms and begged with God's name on his lips. Brāhmaṇas like him carry a pouch with ten openings: each to a compartment for various food-stuffs, such as rice, lentils, wheat flour, etc. In the court-yard of Bhatji's house there used to be a heap of cooking-utensils, needing washing. The brāhmana looked around and saw no one; he stealthily picked up one of the unwashed bowls and slipped it into his multi-mouthed bag. He wanted to leave in a hurry, but Bhatji had witnessed all this from above. He sent word and brought him up immediately, and said, 'Sir, please keep your bag over there and be seated on this bed.' The brāhmaṇa shrank with fear and sat down. Bhatji said to one of the servants, 'Bring a gift of foodstuffs on a new plate with a new cup, water-pot and tumbler.' The servant quickly obeyed. The brāhmaṇa thought, 'Thank God: Bhatji couldn't see a thing. I am safe.' He was about to get up to fetch his bag with a view to filling it. Just then, Bhatji said to him, 'You need not bring the bag, all these utensils are for you only. Sir, you are certainly in need of utensils; otherwise why would you have taken an unwashed bowl? The fault is ours: we don't keep track of your needs. You please take all these things.' Then the brāhmaṇa wept and, falling at his feet, exclaimed, 'Are you a man or a god?' From that time the life of the brāhmaṇa was transformed.

Returning from a walk one day, I found at Bhatji's a scabby, ugly-looking brāhmaṇa lying on Bhatji's bed and a woman applying oil to his body. Bhatji, seated nearby, was thumbing through a book on Āyurveda (Hindu system of medicine).

'What's this, Bhatji?' I asked him. He replied, 'This man is abnormally-sexed, lustful. According to our therapeutics a person with this malady should be laid on a soft bed and, in the presence of the physician, be anointed by a woman seated beside him. Having made this arrangement, I am now searching the medicaments.' 'But' I said, 'why on your bed?' Bhatji replied, 'There would have been some delay in getting and spreading a soft bed; so I have made this arrangement.' In course of time, that psychotic man became a member of his household.

As the afore-mentioned illness of Bhatji

did not heal soon, he went for change of air to live in a bungalow situated in a meadow and took me also with him. There one day we had just finished our noon meal and were washing. Just then from a distance in the meadow a woman's voice was heard. I could hardly make anything out of it. But no sooner did Bhatji hear that cry then he scurried off in his wooden sandals. I remained in the room waiting for his return. When he came back I saw that his face was flushed and sweat running down his body. I inquired, 'What is the matter? Where did you go?' Bhatji replied: 'A woman in the meadow had collected some cowdung, and implored a passerby to help her lift the load on to her head. The passerby turned a deaf ear.' Watching this from a distance, Bhatji understood that the woman was in distress and went over to help her lift the load. He was then in his sixties.

The elderly Bhatji used to recite a Sanskrit couplet which escapes my memory now. But its purport is this: 'I do not want such a heaven or any divine abode where there is absolutely no opportunity of doing service or a good turn to man.'[1] At one time, while Swami Vivekananda was listening to this couplet of Bhatji's recited by me, tears had streamed down his eyes.

On observing Bhatji's life, I specially felt in my heart of hearts that serving and loving man is the greatest of all things. I used to derive immense joy by tending this great man during his illness.

[1] In his last days, Swami Akhandananda used often to say that the couplet was probably this:

न त्वहं कामये राज्यं न स्वर्गं नापुनर्भवम् ।
कामये दुःखतप्तानां प्राणिनामार्तिनाशनम् ॥

'O Lord, I do not want any kingdom, nor heavenly pleasure, nor even escape from rebirth. But I do want that the affliction of all beings tormented by the miseries of life may cease.'

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(*Continued from p.* 54)

Well, this is all talk. In those days they did not really believe in spiritual culture, in really diving deep, in really meditating on God as Sri Ramakrishna said, 'In your mind, in the corner of your house; or, maybe, if you find time, in a forest—not showing your "spirituality" to others.' But still they talked big. They believed in lecturing on religion whether they were actually themselves religious or not. And they believed in organizing societies and preaching in the name of religion. To such Sri Ramakrishna said, 'All these things will not carry you very far. If you are commissioned by God, then only will all these things be effective, not otherwise.'

He emphasized that if we want to be religious, we should not live just on the surface; we should not even think of organizing or making others religious. First, let us ourselves be religious. If you can light your own lamp, a hundred more lamps can be lighted from it. If your lamp itself has no flame in it, with what will you light others? If the salt has lost its savour, with what will it be salted? That is the question Sri Ramakrishna has put before us, and his answer is clear.

MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY: CHRISTIAN AND HINDU

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

A Sister: How can work outside the convent be compatible with a contemplative life? How does India's monastic system solve this problem?

Swami: India's monastic life was entirely contemplative from the very beginning. Either the monks and nuns stayed in the monastery or convent, or wandered from place to place depending on alms from the householders. They lived in forests or caves, singly or in groups, and were served by individual householders nearby, or by religious-charitable institutions set up by the householders for the purpose; some more daring monastics lived only on fruits or roots or what chance might bring. All these took no interest in the secular concerns of life.

But in the modern age, a change has come over the organization and programme of monastic life for many. First of all it is centred in monasteries; secondly and following from the first, individual monks or nuns do not generally go out to beg; they are cared for by the monastic institutions maintained by voluntary contributions of householder devotees. This type of life co-exists with the wandering or cave- or forest-dwelling monastics. Many of these modern monasteries also concern themselves with man's secular problems, like poverty, illiteracy, disease, etc., and conduct institutions to serve people in these fields. This is particularly the case with the Ramakrishna Order, to which I belong. And this combination of the active life and the contemplative life is effected by the Ramakrishna Order in the light of a unifying philosophy, the Vedānta, as interpreted by the *Gītā* in the past, and by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in the present age.

India is now passing through an industrial revolution; it is making for vast and rapid social changes. This has necessitated changes in the organization and programme of Indian monasticism as well; certainly, it is posing a challenge to Indian wisdom; and that wisdom has responded to that challenge through teachers like Swami Vivekananda, in whom our age-old monasticism has acquired a new vitality and national relevance and a new enlightened relationship with lay society. Because of this, the general public, even in its modern progressive section, have the same high regard for the monk as before, and take delight in serving him, who on his part also takes spiritual delight in serving the lay public.

Another Sister: We nuns now live in the convent, but work in the world outside and run the convent with our own earnings. Western society has undergone revolutionary changes, especially since the end of the Second World War. People are not any more interested or inclined to give any help to monks or nuns. They have, therefore, to work and earn to run their convents and monasteries, increasingly. They have to beg no more. They have to become aligned with modern life; and yet we have, as monks and nuns, to draw our nourishment from our inner lives. This is posing a difficult problem for us; what suggestion have you to give to us on this?

Swami: The West is passing through a difficult period of adjustment; it is not that the western people today are atheistic and unspiritual: they are in earnest search of true religion. But they are dissatisfied with

its outmoded dogmatic and institutional forms, its anti-scientific attitudes, and its colonialist and similar worldly expressions. When they will come across a rational and spiritual presentation and exemplification of religion, they will respond wholeheartedly and a new religious revolution will sweep over the West. And India's contribution to this is going to be vital : it will help in the emergence of a pure, rational, spiritual Christianity. In the meantime and with a view to bringing about such a desirable revolution, the monks and nuns of today have to uphold the spiritual ideals in their lives and work and remain beacons of strength and inspiration to western society. They must continue to bear witness to the truth of God by their holy and pure lives. They should treat their convents and monasteries as laboratories of the science of God. And yet, they may have to work outside and earn their living and mix with the world, and treat all that as a continuation of their spiritual strivings within the convent or monastery, thus demonstrating that contemplation and action are complementary and not contradictory. You are not away from God at the time of work. Contemplation as an exclusive form of spiritual life may cease to have such importance as in the past; but it will become more and more attractive, and more widespread and sought-after by many monastics as well as laymen, for short periods and for once or twice a year. These short intense spiritual experiences will help them to retain a God-awareness during the rest of the year.

Another Sister : Is it necessary to have a certain attitude towards outside work?

Swami : Yes; the spiritual attitude during meditation, worship, and prayer has to be continued, in varying intensity, during work also. The effort should be to live a God-centred life. If you consider that the work you do is worldly work, it will not help spiritually. Spiritual life is universal in scope; when we change our centre from our limited ego to God, we change also our attitude to work, but not necessarily the work itself. This is how the laymen's life and work also can become spiritualized. This is the direction of the future religion of humanity, as our sages pointed out long ago. More and more people will live in the world without being worldly; spirituality will be a universal quality, not the privilege of the monastics—but there may be varying grades of it. Some may have grown more, spiritually, some less, but everyone will be on the spiritual path. As beautifully expressed by Sri Ramakrishna: Live in the world; there is no harm in that. But don't allow the world, worldliness, to live in you. That will make for stagnation. A boat will be on the water; that is the correct place for the boat; but water should not be allowed in the boat. That is the wrong place for the water, and it will also make the boat unfit for the purpose for which it is meant.

This teaching should be given to one and all by nuns and monks who dare to live and work in the world establishing God in their hearts. This lesson cannot be imparted either by a worldly person—because it will not have authenticity—or by a monastic who lives exclusively a contemplative life.

Another Sister: To preserve this God-centred attitude, we have to isolate ourselves in contemplation?

Swami: Yes; in the early stages, and for short periods regularly each day, till we become spiritually strong. In the beginning stages, one certainly gets spiritually diluted by constantly mixing with worldly people and activities. Hence we need to retreat inwardly, periodically, and gain fresh strength and inspiration. But if and when we become like Brother Lawrence, we shall find, like him, no distinction between work and

worship. There will be a flood of God-awareness all the time. Spiritual effort and struggle is compared by St. Teresa to watering our farms: In the beginning, we have to dig a well and laboriously lift its water to irrigate the fields; then we secure a Persian wheel which makes the irrigation less laborious and more efficient; and finally comes the downpour of God's rain when hard labour ends and irrigation becomes spontaneous and natural. This last represents the descent of the grace of God on the struggling aspirant. But till that happens, it is all struggle but a struggle which is not dismal but pleasant, because God is involved in it both as its means and as its end.

Swami Vivekananda has therefore instituted a spiritual programme of work combined with meditation—with more stress on meditation, in the West, and on work in India—and occasional or annual spiritual retreats for a more intense spiritual experience. While putting greater stress on meditation for westerners, he imparts one teaching which the West today needs badly to understand and implement; namely, to treat work as a spiritual discipline and not as a drudgery. The concept of work as drudgery, and consequently of joy as obtainable only outside work, in leisure, has unfortunately developed greatly in the modern West. When the spirit of service is taken away from work, it becomes dismal drudgery; then pleasure is to be sought in one's leisure hours. Even the care of one's baby becomes drudgery: becomes mechanical, bereft of love, soul-killing as much to the mother as to the baby. This attitude is getting to be widespread in the West, specially in the U.S.A., and it has incapacitated man for his *spiritual growth* from *individuality* to *personality*, from stagnation of the ego at the organic level to the warmth and expanse of his true self, from evolution at his *organic level* to evolution at his *psycho-social level*. This stagnation at what Bertrand Russell termed the billiard-ball individuality level is the source of most contemporary personal and inter-personal tensions and unfulfilments. Hence the need for this teaching of Swami Vivekananda, this teaching of the *Gītā*, about doing work as service, in a spirit of love and dedication. This is also the teaching of Christianity.

Monastic life in the West must become capable of conveying this great message to the people, so that they may be led on the road of their spiritual growth from *stagnant individuals* into *warm personalities*, led on the road of fulfilment, individual and collective. Such teaching becomes effective only if backed by *personal example*. If you can work hard, face your problems, serve the people with love and dedication, and be all this and do all this in a calm and cheerful spirit, your life and work will show an inner richness which will stand in contrast to the inner poverty of even the most successful worldly people. And if they ask you whence you got all that inner richness, and learn that its source is God, what better demonstration of the truth of God and its value for human life and fulfilment could there be? This is the force of the utterance of Jesus: By their fruits shall ye know them.

Another Sister: I do not know whether we are strong enough to succeed in it.

Swami: Even a little success in this line will be a source of much strength to human society today. Society derives strength and inspiration from the people, maybe a small group, whose lives, in the language of Christian mysticism, stand as witnesses to God. Otherwise, this monastic life has no meaning: the light shining in a monk or a nun is a strange new light, the light of the spirit, the light of God. And it must be bright enough to illumine others as much as itself. This is the meaning of what Jesus

referred to as the difference between putting a light under a bushel and putting it on a candlestick: the latter spreads its light around, destroying the prevailing darkness. And, let the light in thee so shine before men . . . , exhorts Jesus.

Another Sister: Can you explain what you mean by meditation?

Swami: Meditation, of course, is intense thought of God with the senses withdrawn from the outer world and the mind calm and concentrated. In meditation, the self of man approaches, in awareness, God, who is the infinite Self of all. Nothing else is present at that time except you and God: you in communion with God.

Sister: If I have correctly understood it, in meditation there is no activity of even speech or thought?

Swami: There can be thought and speech, but all within the mind, and within the context of communion with God; and when meditation deepens, such speech and thought also will disappear in perfect communion of the soul with God.

Sister: To cut off all thoughts is a very difficult thing to do for us.

Swami: One need not cut off all thoughts, but only worldly thoughts.

Sister: But worldly thoughts pursue us even when we are in meditation.

Swami: They pursue us there, because we have been pursuing them all the time before.

Another Sister: If we can place these thoughts in the context of a correct spiritual attitude, they come to rest and cease to disturb us any more. That is different from putting them out of our minds by will power, which will not prevent their coming back into our minds again.

Swami: Indeed; a proper spiritual attitude is most helpful in this.

Another Sister: Is it possible for us to influence this process? Thoughts just rise in our minds without our having the power to influence the process.

Swami: Yes; they appear on their own. That is why we practise meditation and try to gain the strength to discipline the whole process. When we leave the mind to itself and its ways, it doesn't trouble us; it troubles us and rebels only when we try to discipline it. By meditating on God, we succeed in removing its rebellious nature, slowly and steadily, and eventually make it our friend in our spiritual life. In one whole hour of meditation, the state of calmness may appear hardly for a minute or two, in the beginning. Even this is a great achievement. Out of a ton of ore, we may obtain only an ounce or two of gold; but it is gold, and we are richer by that much.

Sister: That is not exactly what I mean; not just 'in meditation' but 'in life'. I want to live my inner life in the strength of my own inner resources or in the strength of God; but the life situation does disturb this process and I am helpless to avert it.

Swami: That is generally true: we take to the religious life drawn by love of God. Then we find ourselves between two initially opposing forces: those of our past tendencies, on the one side, and our newly arisen love of God on the other. You became a nun because you were attracted by the more powerful magnet of God; but the magnet of the sense-world is still powerful enough to draw you away from that magnet of God, and you need meditation and prayer to resist it and draw closer and closer to God. The feeling that you belong to God is intensified during meditation, and you gain thus adequate inner spiritual resources to order your life in your own way. That is spiritual freedom, the birthright of every human being, but a birthright rarely exercised by most.

Another Sister: As we told you before, we are nuns in the convent but working girls outside: this is a new experiment in Roman Catholic monasticism. While at

work outside, we were secular dress. After working for five days I am happy to get two days of the week off as holiday. Is this an escape?

Swami: As a practical consideration, there is no harm in it; it is not any escape. But philosophically considered, it becomes an escape if you treat your five days' work as drudgery. You do need change and rest after your work; but your philosophy of life must include a sense of joy in the work itself. Then it will be a change from joy to a deeper joy and not from compelling drudgery to the escape of relaxation. That second attitude is a harmful, modern, utterly worldly attitude, as I remarked once earlier.

Another Sister: People want us to help them so much that they claim all our energy. How is one to face this?

Swami: That is natural: just human. You have to respect the dictum: Unto whom much is given, from him (or her) much shall be expected. We have to give our best, subject to our limitations. It is also true that spiritual work does not tire a person as selfish worldly work does.

Sister: I leave the convent for work at 7-30 a.m. and I return at 5-30 p.m. My attitude is: Go to work to serve God; that is also my prayer.

Swami: That is the right attitude. Through your work you are serving the Lord by bringing cheer and happiness to the people. Yours is a 24-hour-a-day, lifelong dedication to God, as much during work outside the convent as during meditation and study within it. That is the true meaning of monastic life—this spiritual flooding of one's life.

Sister: Is it necessary to have the same attitude during sleep also?

Swami: When you enter into sleep with the thought of God, that sleep gets the flavour of divine absorption. A spiritual person sleeps in the lap of God. Sleep is nourishment, as eating is nourishment, and both equip us for our search for God. For a devotee of God every act bears on God only. And for all nuns like you and for all monks everywhere, the convent or the monastery becomes like a fort. You work outside for hours, but you are not able to stand the pressure of the sense-world on you; you have not yet become strong enough spiritually to stand that pressure. You then retreat into your convent and find in it the security of a fort. It is a spiritual security. This is not provided by just the building of the convent—that is only a negative factor—but by the community of the other nuns. A spiritual community provides an environment of spiritual buoyancy to its members, a sense of cumulative spiritual strength. We need this protection when we are not spiritually strong enough. The ideal state is that you feel the same spiritual security in the market place as in the convent. Until that strength is achieved it is wise to take the help of the security of the convent; and also take steps to strengthen the spiritual atmosphere of the convent by regular spiritual practices—including spiritual study and conversation—and await the descent of the grace of God, when alone is perfect security attained. God is described in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* of the Hindu religion as: *akutobhayam,* 'where is fear?' i.e., the state of fearlessness, and the seeker of religion is described by the same book as: *gacchatām akutobhayam*, 'one who is proceeding towards the state of fearlessness'.

Another Sister: Is it necessary to come back to this 'fort' to gather new energy?

Swami: It is not mandatory; one seeks the security of the 'fort' when one feels the need for it.

Another Sister: When working outside also, one can get inspiration.

Swami: To the spiritually strong, there is inspiration everywhere. For all others, it is necessary to gain spiritual strength from within the convent and, in that strength, go

out and work in the world. Outside in the world, there is an excess of carbon dioxide, whereas, within the convent, there is more of the much-needed oxygen. (*laughter*)

Another Sister: Sometimes, while working outside, just the opposite happens.

Swami: Sri Ramakrishna gives a beautiful example: When you plant a small plant on the roadside, you put a fencing round it: otherwise, goats and sheep will eat it. But when it has grown into a strong tree, you remove the fencing; it does not need that protection any more. Then even an elephant can be tied to it. Similarly, when our spirituality is weak, we need all this protection. It will be foolhardy on our part not to avail ourselves of it. At this stage, too much mixing with the sense-bound world will make for the dilution, and eventual loss, of that little fund of spirituality.

Another Sister: I do not agree with this.

Swami: Yes; provided you are convinced that you are strong enough.

Sister: Jesus preached and did his evangelical work in the midst of the world, for the world, and for the people.

Swami: Certainly, Jesus worked in the world and for the world. But there is a world of difference between *working in the world* and *working in worldliness*. Suppose you are working in an institution, for example, in a hospital. It is divine work, though it is work in the world. You do your work there and return to your convent. This is according to what Jesus did and said. But suppose you get into all the cocktail parties of the city, that will not be working in the world, but merging into worldliness, and also eventually losing the capacity to help the world.

Sister: Jesus came across blind and handicapped people, and he helped them. When I go out into the world and am confronted with all the misery and sadness of the people, I do feel the call of their suffering; and only in responding to it do I feel the reality of the evangelical mission.

Swami: That is wonderful; but a successful reponse of that type demands spiritual strength on the part of the person concerned. Only one who knows how to swim can save another who is drowning.

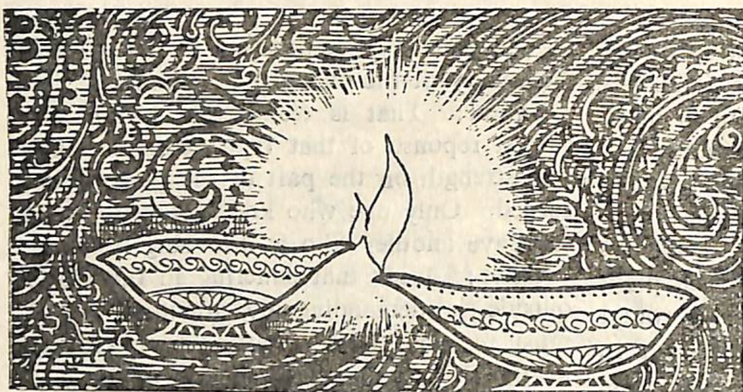
Sister: I see that suffering in the world outside is demanding my attention, and I must respond to it by using every means available, including the medium of the TV. I have no need to stay in this 'fort' of a convent. If the evangelical mission is real, it must make me go out into the world.

Swami: The sentiment is admirable; but one must not overlook one's limitations. Jesus was divine: he could fearlessly mix with the world, mix even with sinners, live with them, but also redeem them. But those that are not that strong need, even while heartily responding to the call of the evangelical mission, to resort to some measure of spiritual security.

Another Sister: Is there a difference between the monastic life and this kind of evangelical mission, in India?

Swami: As I described earlier, our traditional monastic background in India is largely of the contemplative type; whatever evangelical aspect it has is confined to the preaching of religion and philosophy to the householders without any reference to social service activities. Such activities were and are considered the responsibilities of the householders and their secular institutions. The monk in India is considered civically dead. But the new monasticism in India, in the wake of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, combines contemplation and social service, under the inspiration and guidance of the unifying philosophy and spirituality of the Vedānta, which bridges the gulf between the sacred and the secular, the inner and the outer.

(*To be concluded*)



ILLUMINATING DIALOGUES FROM INDIAN LORE

'ŚVETAKETU, THAT THOU ART'

There once lived Śvetaketu the grandson of Aruṇa. To him his father said: 'Śvetaketu, lead the life of a *brahmacārin* (celibate student under a teacher); for there is none belonging to our family, who, not having studied the Vedas, is a *brāhmaṇa*, a knower of Brahman, only by birth and name.

Śvetaketu followed his father's behest. He went to his teacher's house when he was twelve years old and studied the Vedas till he was twenty-four. Then he returned to his father, serious, considering himself well read, and arrogant.

Father: 'Śvetaketu, since you are now so serious, think yourself well read, and are so arrogant, have you, my dear, ever asked for that instruction by which one hears what cannot be heard, by which one perceives what cannot be perceived, by which one knows what cannot be known?'

Śvetaketu: 'What is that instruction, venerable sir?'

Father: 'Just as, my dear, by one clod of clay all that is made of clay is known, the modification being only a name, arising from speech, while the truth is that all is clay; just as by one nugget of gold all that is made of gold is known, the modification being only a name, arising from speech, while the truth is that all is gold; and just as by one nail-parer all that is made of iron is known, the modification being only a name, arising from speech, while the truth is that all is iron—even so, my dear, is that instruction.'

Śvetaketu: 'Surely that venerable teacher did not know that. For if he had known it, why should he not have told me? Therefore do you tell me about it.'

Father: 'So be it, my dear. In the beginning this universe was Being (*sat*) alone, one only without a second. Some say that in the beginning this was non-being (*asat*) alone, one only without a second; and from that non-being, being was born. But how, indeed, could it be thus? How could Being be born from non-being? No, it was Being alone that existed in the beginning, one only without a second.

'*Sat* projected from Itself, by Its own inscrutable power called *māyā*, the three elements: fire, water, and earth. After making them gross through a particular method of combination, Pure Being entered into them as the living self, like the reflection of the sun entering into water or a mirror. These three elements are present in fire, the sun, the moon and all created objects. Therefore objects, when properly understood, disappear as such and there remains nothing but the three elements.

which, in their turn, are the same as *sat*. As all things are only modifications of Pure Being, the Knowledge of Pure Being makes them all known. Thus by the knowledge of One all things become known. The subtlest parts of fire, (ingested in the form of fat), water and food (i.e., earth) develop into speech, the *prāṇa* and the mind, respectively. [In order to demonstrate the latter, he continued:] A person, my dear, consists of sixteen parts. Do not eat any food for fifteen days, but drink as much water as you like. Since the *prāṇa* consists of water, it will not be cut off if you drink water.'

Śvetaketu did not eat for fifteen days. Then he came to his father and said: 'What, sir, shall I recite?'

Father: 'The Ṛk, Yajus and Sāman verses.'

Śvetaketu: 'They do not occur to me.'

Father: 'Just as of a great blazing fire a single coal, the size of a firefly, may be left, which would not burn much more than that, even so, my dear, of your sixteen parts only one part is left; and therefore with that one part you do not remember the Vedas. Now go and eat and you will understand me.'

Śvetaketu ate and approached his father. Then whatever his father asked him, he showed that he knew it.

Father: 'Just as of a great lighted fire a single coal, the size of a firefly, if left, may be made to blaze up again by adding grass to it, and will thus burn much more, even so, my dear, of your sixteen parts only one part was left, and that, when strengthened by food, blazed up. With it you now remember the Vedas. Therefore the mind consists of food, the *prāṇa* consists of water, and speech consists of fire.

'Learn from me the true nature of sleep. When a person has entered into deep sleep, as it is called, then he becomes united with Pure Being (*sat*), he has gone to his own Self. That is why they say he is in deep sleep (*svapiti*); it is because he has gone (*apītaḥ*) to his own (*svaṁ*).

'Just as a bird tied by a string first flies in every direction, and then finding no rest anywhere, settles down at the place where it is bound, so also the mind (i.e., individual soul reflected in the mind), my dear, after flying in every direction and finding no rest anywhere, settles down in the *prāṇa* (Pure Being); for the mind (individual soul) is fastened to the *prāṇa* (Pure Being).

'Learn from me what hunger and thirst are. When a man is hungry, as they say, it is water that has carried away what was eaten. Therefore, just as they speak of a leader of cows, a leader of horses, a leader of men, so do they speak of water as the leader of food. So, know this body to have sprung forth from a cause, for it cannot be without a root.

'And where could its root be except in food (earth)? And in the same way, as food too is an offshoot, seek for water as its root. And as water too is an offshoot, seek for fire as its root. And as fire too is an offshoot, seek for Being (*sat*) as its root. Yes, all these creatures, my dear, have their root in Being, they dwell in Being, they finally rest in Being.

'When a man is said to be thirsty, it is fire that has carried away what was drunk by him. Therefore they speak of fire as the leader of water. So, know this body to have sprung forth from a cause, for it cannot be without a root. And where could its root be except in water? And in the same way as water is an offshoot, seek for fire as its root. And as fire too is an offshoot seek for Being as its root. All these creatures have their root in Being, they dwell in Being and finally rest in Being.

'Now, that which is the subtle essence—in it all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Śvetaketu.'

Śvetaketu: 'Please, venerable Sir, give me further instruction.'

Father: 'So be it, my dear. As bees make honey by collecting the juices of trees located at different places, and reduce them to one form, and as these juices have no discrimination so as to be able to say: "I am the juice of this tree", or "I am the juice of that tree"—even so, indeed, all these creatures, though they reach Pure Being, do not know that they have reached Pure Being. That which is the subtle essence—in it all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Śvetaketu.'

Śvetaketu: 'Please, venerable sir, give me further instruction.'

Father: 'So be it, my dear. These rivers flow—the eastern toward the east and western toward the west. They arise from the sea and flow into the sea. Just as these rivers, while they are in the sea do not know: "I am this river" or "I am that river", even so all these creatures, even though they have come from Pure Being, do not know that they have come from Pure Being. That which is the subtle essence—in it all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Śvetaketu.'

Śvetaketu: 'Please, venerable sir, give me further instruction.'

Father: 'So be it, my dear. If someone were to strike at the root of this large tree here, it would bleed but live. If he were to strike at the middle, it would bleed but live. If he were to strike at the top, it would bleed but live. Pervaded by the living self, that tree stands firm, drinking in again and again its nourishment and rejoicing. But if the life leaves one of its branches, that branch withers; if it leaves a second, that branch withers, if it leaves the whole tree, the whole tree withers. In exactly the same manner know this: This body dies, bereft of the living self; but the living self dies not. That which is the subtle essence—in it all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Śvetaketu.'

Śvetaketu: 'Please give me further instruction.'

Father: 'So be it, my dear. Bring me a fruit of that banyan tree.'

Śvetaketu: 'Here it is, venerable sir.'

Father: 'Break it.'

Śvetaketu: 'It is broken, sir.'

Father: 'What do you see there?'

Śvetaketu: 'These seeds exceedingly small'.

Father: 'Break one of these, my son.'

Śvetaketu: 'It is broken.'

Father: 'What do you see there?'

Śvetaketu: 'Nothing at all.'

Father: 'That subtle essence which you do not perceive there—from that very essence this great banyan tree arises. Believe me. That which is the subtle essence—in it all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Śvetaketu.'

Śvetaketu: 'Please give me further instruction.'

Father: 'So be it, my dear. Place this salt in water and then come to me in the morning.'

The son did as he was told.

Father: 'Bring me the salt which you placed in the water last night.'

Looking for it, Śvetaketu did not find it, for it was completely dissolved.

Father: 'Take a sip of water from the surface. How is it?'

Śvetaketu: 'It is salt.'

Father: 'Take a sip from the middle. How is it?'

Śvetaketu: 'It is salt.'

Father: 'Take a sip from the bottom. How is it?'

Śvetaketu: 'It is salt.'

Father: 'Throw it away and come to me. Here also, my dear, in this body you do not perceive *sat* (Being), but It is indeed

there. Now that which is the subtle essence —in it all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Śvetaketu.'

Śvetaketu: 'Please give me further instruction.'

Father: 'So be it, my dear. The police bring a man whom they have seized by the hand and say: "He has taken something, he has committed a theft." When he denies it, they say: "Heat the axe for him." If he has committed the theft but denies it, then he makes himself a liar. Being false-minded, he covers himself with falsehood, grasps the heated axe and is burnt. Then he is killed. But if he did not commit the theft, then he makes himself what he really is. Being pure-minded, he covers himself with truth, grasps the heated axe, and is not burnt. He is released. As that truthful man is not burnt, so also he who has known *sat* is not born again. Thus in That (*sat*) all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Śvetaketu.'

Then Śvetaketu understood that *Sat* from his father, yea, he understood it.

Source: *Chāndogya-upaniṣad,* Chapter VI.

HEIDEGGER'S 'ESSENT' AND THE CONCEPT OF POLARITY

LOUISE MCNERTNEY AND DR. GRIHAPATI MITRA

In his book *An Introduction to Metaphysics,* Martin Heidegger claims the fundamental question of metaphysics to be: why are there essents rather than nothing ?[1] According to Heidegger and to his Greek predecessor Parmenides, this question impinges upon us at all times, whether or not we are aware of it. Since this question does indeed stand out, upon reflection, to be 'the most far reaching, . . . , the deepest, . . . , the most fundamental of all questions',[2] it is the purpose of this paper to interpret the question as Heidegger has posed it, and then to reformulate the question so as to strike even more forcefully at the root of man's asking 'why ?'

'Essent' is a word coined by the translator because he considered no English word generally in use to be equivalent to Heidegger's German 'Sein'. Neither 'being' nor 'existent' seemed appropriate, therefore translator Ralph Manheim designated 'essent' as a word close in meaning to the former two, but standing apart conceptually. Manheim, in a footnote to the text, equates 'essents' with 'things that art'. Thus, Heidegger apparently says that the goal of philosophy is to discover why things *are* instead of are *not.* As Heidegger stresses, the fundamental question does not merely ask 'why are there essents ?' because the concomitant consideration of nothingness is just as basic. 'Ever since the question about the essent began, the question about the nonessent, about nothing, has gone side by side with it.'[3]

Heidegger's formulation of the fundamental question, upon an initial inspection, seems to encompass the trends of all philosophical quests. In Heidegger's words:

> 'It is the widest of all questions. It confines itself to no particular essent of

[1] Martin Heidegger: *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1961), p. 1.

[2] ibid., p. 2.

[3] ibid., p. 20.

whatever kind. The question takes in everything, and this means not only everything that is present in the broadest sense but also everything that ever was or will be.'[4]

Of course, the reason why Heidegger's question is so basic is that it is inexorably linked with the question of being. Being, the concept which surrounds us completely, with which we are thoroughly familiar but which we cannot express at all verbally, is the illusory idea bound up in all philosophical thought. As Heidegger states, although 'the word "being" is indefinite in meaning . . . yet we understand it definitely'.[5] Being is not equated by Heidegger with essent; rather, the concept of being underlies the concept of essent. As Heidegger illustrates with several examples, each essent has the attribute of being, but it also has the attribute of potentially *not* being. One illustration Heidegger provides is a piece of chalk:

> 'This piece of chalk has extension; it is a relatively solid, grayish white thing with a definite shape, and apart from all that, it is a thing to write with.'

But, he adds:

> 'This particular thing has the attribute of lying here; but just as surely, it has the attribute of potentially not lying here and not being so large. The possibility of being guided along the blackboard and of being used up is not something that we add to the thing by thought. Itself, as this essent, is in this possibility.'

To summarize his point, Heidegger concludes: 'Insofar as the essent resists the extreme possibility of nonbeing, it stands in being, but it has never caught up with or overcome the possibility of nonbeing.'[6]

Thus, we see that, liaisoned with each essent are the qualities of being *and* nonbeing, making the question 'why are there essents and not nothing?' the fundamental inquiry of metaphysics.

Nevertheless, despite the apparent basic and encompassing qualities of the question in the above form, one must realize, as Heidegger himself is quick to point out, that the appearance of 'nothing' in the question poses a definite problem: 'The range of this question finds its limit only in nothing, in that which simply is not and never was.'[7] The reason why nothing presents such an obstacle in our asking of the question is that, although we are trying to present essents—something—in opposition to nothing and to understand why there is one and not the other, the moment we speak of nothing it becomes something. In other words, to speak of nothing implies that nothing *is*, whereas we are trying to conceive that nothing *is not*. Nothingness, unlike being, is beyond our comprehension.

This troublesome situation exists because Heidegger, like anyone else, can only think within the positive mode of creation. Although he is trying to understand the negative mode—nothingness—he can only conceive of this nothingness in reference to the positive world with which he is familiar. For example, when one sees a tree, he is observing and thinking in the positive mode of creation; when one tries to think of the nothingness of the tree, the no-tree, he is still thinking in reference to the tree; that is, a human being continually refers his thoughts to the positive mode, so that no-tree in a sense becomes an essent. Similarly, one thinks of no-book and no-table only in reference to book and to table. Thus, every concept of nothingness a person attempts to grasp becomes, merely by that attempt, a something in its own right; no-tree is different from no-book, and each is different from no-table, and we apparently cannot imagine, within our frame of reference, one totally comprehensive abstraction of nothingness.

4 ibid., p. 2.
5 ibid., p. 66.
6 ibid., p. 25.

7 ibid., p. 2.

Therefore, perhaps Martin Heidegger's fundamental question should be rephrased from another viewpoint.

Before we attempt this rephrasing, let us consider an example in the physical world of what we shall try to conceptualize on a spiritual level. When one stands in front of a mirror, he sees the reflection of his person. Why, he may ask, can he stand thus on one side of a mirror, and yet be unable to go to the other side ? (Note the parallel between this question and that of Heidegger.)

Actually, the individual's reflection and his physical existence are completely bound together in that, so long as the body is present, its reflection would show on the other side of the mirror, and conversely, so long as the reflection is in the mirror, the 'true' body must exist on this side. Now, as the individual moves closer and closer to the mirror, his image likewise 'approaches' him. Ultimately, just on the plane of the mirror, the duality between physical body and reflection ceases to exist ; on the plane of the mirror, the person and his image are one. Imagining further, the two egos—that of the person and that of the image—merge completely on this plane, and it is possible that the person will indeed, from that plane, be able to go to the other side of the mirror. In other words, it well may be that, after the total merging of the two egos has occurred, then, during a subsequent separation—a departure from the plane of the mirror—the ego of the individual would exchange places with the ego of the image, and the person would return to this world possessing the ego which had previously belonged to the image. Thus, the ego of the person could leave the positive world on this side of the mirror to gain entry into, and understanding of, the reflective side of the mirror. To relate this example to the question of essent versus nothing, we realize that, in order to understand nothing, we must be able to cross into the negative mode of creation, and to do this we must reach that spiritual 'plane', or principle, which isolates existence from nonexistence. (We use the qualifier 'spiritual' for lack of a more applicable term.) There, perhaps, our mind and our non-mind would merge and possibly exchange identities. Therefore, basing our thought on this relatively simple example, we can reformulate the fundamental question of metaphysics as follows: What is the principle which separates essents from nothingness ?

The wording of the question in this manner dissolves much of the problem presented by the concept of nothingness. First of all, the question in this form clearly puts nothingness entirely in the negative mode of creation, in a truly fundamental polar relationship to being ; whereas Heidegger's question, it seems, projects nothingness into the positive mode of creation, destroying this ultimate polarity. (Even in his example using chalk, cited above, when Heidegger speaks of 'potential not-being', he is viewing it from the positive mode. Heidegger, of necessity, stays in this example within the construct of being, because no one *can* give an example within the construct of non-being.) As will be indicated below in a discussion of the omnipresence of polarity, the maintenance of a purely polar association between nothingness and essent seems to fit more symmetrically into the scheme of creation. Further, and more importantly, the question rephrased in the above form does more than merely mention nothingness ; rather, by referring to the plane of separation, the question as such clearly indicates how our mind may one day be able to comprehend nothingness.

Obviously, the mirror example has two basic limitations which obstruct its direct application to the question at hand. First, there is a difference of dimension in the physical world between the three-dimensional person on one side of the mirror and his two-dimensional image on the other side. In contrast, an essent and its nothingness would

both be in the same spiritual 'dimension'. Secondly, in the physical example we are applying our mind, which functions only within the limits of the positive mode and which possesses the memory faculty. In the spiritual plane, if a separation of egos occurred, perhaps there would be no way to distinguish between the two.

Despite these limitations, the example is extremely useful in formulating the fundamental question because the physical illustration provides a familiar basis upon which our minds and our higher faculties can further elaborate. The duality caused by the plane of the mirror, which produces the separation of object and image, may be compared with the duality of the positive and negative modes of creation. Therefore, as was stated above, the plane of division between these two created modes is what we should seek when we inquire about the nature of essent versus nothingness.

Duality is indeed an important concept describing the world we inhabit, a concept repeatedly probed by Eastern philosophers but sorely neglected by most occidental thinkers. Duality, according to the basic tenets of oriental thought, appears through the illusion of māyā; this ignorance causes us to see duality, or multiplicity, where in reality there is only oneness. Realization of Brahman, the underlying principle of existence, dissolves the misconception of duality.

Brahman may be considered to be a representative concept of what we are trying to realize as a boundary plane between the positive and negative modes of creation. Brahman exhibits no dualities, no vector qualities, no polarities. It is rather the 'origin' of all vector qualities, so to speak, the collection of dimensionless points from which emanate all positive and negative attributes. Similarly, what we are seeking in our question is a 'collection of points'—a spiritual plane—from which evolve the positive character of being and the negative character of nothingness.

A fundamental difference exists between the universal polarity of which one generally speaks and the essent *v.* nothingness principle which we are attempting to realize: polarities are all contained within the positive mode of creation. Nevertheless, a further look at the concept of polarity may help, like the mirror example, in establishing a foundation from which we can further conceptualize. For, indeed, upon recognizing the polar nature of *all* things in the universe, we may better realize the feasibility of an even more basic 'polar' relationship between essents and nothingness, and, therefore, the value in seeking the principle wherein this polarity ceases to exist (that is, the principle where essents and nothingness exactly meet and merge).

Alan W. Watts' book, *The Two Hands of God*, illustrates the ubiquitous nature of the polarity principle. Not only in obvious examples, but in subtle elements of nature, Watts points to the 'inner unity of opposites'. Using various myths from different cultures, Watts emphasizes man's intuitive understanding that no quality stands alone in existence, that each has its opposite counterpart. In other words, one could not recognize light had he never known darkness; one could not appreciate good without evil, large without small, joy without sorrow, etc., and, we would choose to add, essent without nothingness. Even life and death, as Watts states, 'are not so much alternatives as alternations, *poles* [my own emphasis] of a single process which may be called life-and-death'.[8] Citing psychological experiments, Watts stresses that our perceptual faculties are obstinately patterned to register this polar quality in nature, although the recognition is often subconscious; for example, as Watts quotes the

[8] Alan W. Watts: *The Two Hands of God* (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1971), p. 10.

Gestalt theory of perception, 'we are not aware of any figure—be it an image, sound, or tactile impression—except in relation to a background'.[9] Further, in speaking of man and his cognizance of the universe, Watts states that: 'Knowledge is not an encounter between two separate things—a knowing subject and a known object. Knowledge, or better, *knowing*, is a relationship in which knower and known are like the poles in a magnetic field.'[10]

Another source for the discovery of polarity (duality) relationships in every aspect of creation is the Upaniṣads, the texts which embody the bulk of ancient Vedic wisdom. As an exemplary passage, consider this selection from the *Praśna-upaniṣad*, which, like so much of the text, reveals Brahman to be that which contains all the polarities of nature but which is nonetheless free from all such vector qualities:

> 'As a bird goes to a tree to roost, even so, O friend, all this rests in the Supreme Ātman: Earth and its subtle counterpart, water and its subtle counterpart, fire and its subtle counterpart, air and its subtle counterpart, ākāśa and its subtle counterpart, the eye and what can be seen, the ear and what can be heard, the nose and what can be smelt, the taste (tongue) and what can be tasted, the skin and what can be touched, the organ of speech and what can be spoken, the hands and what can be grasped, the organ of generation and what can be enjoyed, the organ of excretion and what can be excreted, the feet and what is their destination, the mind (manas) and what can be thought, the intellect (buddhi) and what can be comprehended, the ego (ahamkāra) and the object of egoism, the memory (citta) and its object, knowledge (tejaḥ) and its object, prāṇa and what is to be supported.'[11]

Further, consider the following two passages from major Upaniṣads:

> 'Verily, there are two forms of Brahman: gross and subtle, mortal and immortal, limited and unlimited, definite and indefinite.'[12]

> 'That non-dual Ātman, though never stirring, is swifter than the mind.... Though standing still, It overtakes others who are running.... It moves and moves not; It is far and likewise near. It is inside all this and It is outside all this.'[13]

Indeed, all of oriental scripture points to the dual nature of the universe, emphasizing contrasts, cycles, polarities, and the search for the plane of existence wherein these dualities merge into oneness. Even the notion presented in this paper of a 'plane' between the poles of being and non-being arises in oriental thought, most evidently in the concept of *tanmātras*, which appears in Sankhya philosophy. *Tanmātras* are the five 'subtle essences of sound, touch, colour, taste, and smell',[14] and they symbolize the plane or principle separating sound from no-sound, touch from no-touch, colour from no-colour, taste from no-taste, smell from no-smell, or from our viewpoint, essent from nothingness. Thus, *tanmātra* is clearly a representative illustration, introduced centuries ago into human thought, of the principle we seek in metaphysics.

In summary, one can easily realize that, because the positive mode of creation consists solely of polar qualities and substances, as man has so long acknowledged, a similar but more fundamental polarity exists between the entire positive mode itself and the negative mode. We draw the conclusion that the fundamental question of meta-

(*Continued on p.* 76)

9 ibid., p. 19.

10 ibid., p. 4.

11 Swami Nikhilananda: *The Upanishads* (in one volume) (Harper and Row, New York, 1964), pp. 154-5. (*Praśna-upaniṣad*, IV. 7-8).

12 ibid., p. 199 (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad*, II. iii. 1).

13 ibid., p. 90 (*Īśā-upaniṣad*. 4-5).

14 Jadunath Sinha: *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II (Central Book Agency, Calcutta, 1952), p. 17.



HUMAN TRENDS

THE MORAL IMPERATIVE

In the year 1853, a select committee of the House of Lords heard some interesting evidences from men connected with the Company's government in India. Among these men was Charles E. Trevelyan. Trevelyan, who came out to India in his early youth and rose to the top echelons of the Government of India, was one of the very best administrators that India ever had from England. He was efficient, enlightened, and enthusiastic. He was a Macaulayist, apart from being the famous Victorian's brother-in-law, but had none of Macaulay's arrogant rhetoric in his pronouncements on India. In his evidence, he said something that I cannot but credit to an unusual clear-sightedness on his part. Referring to his habit of mixing with Indians of all ranks and classes and having frequent conversations with them, Trevelyan said:

> 'I used to dilate, perhaps in too boastful a spirit, upon the superior civilization of the Europeans; our navy, our superior military discipline, our manufactures, our steamboats and so forth; and I observed to my surprise that they gave me a cold and indifferent hearing, and they often ended by making an observation something of this sort: "Yes you are a wonderful people, you speak the truth, you keep your word . . ." and by degrees I discovered that the object of their admiration was neither our arts, our arms, nor our science, but our moral qualities. . . . It is this superior morality which enables every young writer on his arrival in a district, although very inferior to many of the natives both in point of experience and intelligence, to command a degree of attention and confidence in his decisions which does not belong to any of these natives.'[1]

After twenty-six years of independence when many of our old antagonisms have mellowed considerably, I am bold enough to say that Trevelyan laid his finger very correctly on the real cause of the British paramountcy in India. Neither their arts nor their arms, neither their gunboats nor their battle-proud generals held the Indians under their sway for two hundred years, for, as soon as these were challenged, the British left hastily. But even to this day their sway over the Indian mind shows no sign of weakening. I am not being ironical and want to just state the fact that as there is an increasing distrust in this country about our ability to govern ourselves, there is a corresponding growth of the feeling that the British achieved something good in this country. It only goes to prove that after the exaggerations of the nationalist days, history itself is setting its records straight. Most forthrightly I want to assert that we will not like to exchange our political freedom for anything in this world, not even in the face of our accumulated misery. This

precious jewel we cannot cast away, unless we do so by relapsing into a barbaric oblivion of all self-esteem. But it is a fact that a large proportion of Indians, and not just retired I.C.S. men, have known some candid moments of regret for the good old British days. Almost every aspiring young man would prefer a British boss to an Indian, being sure that recognition of merit and fairmindedness are not prominent Indian virtues. The Indian boss in his turn throws up his hands in despair at the disappearance of the British-induced virtues of honest work, dutifulness, and fear of law. I may be permitted to quote again from the above testimony of Trevelyan in which he said that the Indians preferred British administrators for their 'disinterestedness and singlemindedness', and, to come to his most ironic observation, 'even supposing that there are natives who come up to this standard, their countrymen would not believe it, they would not give any credit for it'. We distrust ourselves. Almost anybody in this country who tries to do things uprightly and conscientiously will antagonize almost everybody around him, whether his boss or his subordinates. It is also true that almost anybody at the head of an office or programme, be he honest or not, will be immediately maligned and suspected of gross sins and crimes. He will be tried by the public's refusal to know the facts, he will be pilloried by its prejudice. We know our sins, we bring them out into the open, we revel in the masochism of self-abasement.

Our rueful recollections of the Empire are a tribute to the British; they are at the same time an admission of what the British always told us: we are often untruthful, irresponsible, lazy, and we have little moral stamina.

This realization does not make me happy; to assure the reader, who might think that I am an unpatriotic wretch, I hasten to add that it makes me sad. It has made many others sad. Some would leave the country, if they got a chance. Some are gnashing their teeth in quiet desperation; and too many have turned hard-core cynics. 'Revolution', alas, too often just the word, or the vague apocalyptic dream that the word evokes to the romantic in imagination, is too often the prescription of the excited young and the embittered old for the cure of the nation's disease. Even today (Aug. 22, '73) I read in the newspaper that one of our conservative politicians has opined that nothing short of a 'revolution can cure the economic ills, political dishonesty and degrading morals of the country'. But what revolution? How is it to be achieved? Is it just a magic spell that has to be chanted by a thousand voices and the dream will come true? Is it just a pack of slogans to be scratched in charcoal in every conceivable spot on the wall? Is not each individual responsible for what India is and would he suddenly be transmogrified as soon as it is declared by the State that revolution has been achieved? Revolution is very often understood to be an external set of happenings at the top of the society, like seizure of State power, promulgation of laws, plans and promises of State action, and it is this view that I contend with.

'The worth of a State, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it', said John Stuart Mill, whose name shines rather brightly among those who have done some rational thinking about liberty, human worth, and improvements in the lot of mankind. (The fact that Mill was a contemporary of Trevelyan and was actually the man who supervised the entire Indian Administration as Examiner at the India Office is merely coincidental here.) He also said, 'No great improvements in the lot of mankind are possible, until a great change takes place in the fundamental constitution of their modes of thought.'

The revolution for *us* is to just begin to

think, to look inward a little, and find out where we have gone wrong and what we can do to improve ourselves.

In a period of anarchy and moral vacuum the British came to occupy the country with their arts and arms. Surely they did not do that by the rules of chivalry. They bribed and tricked, they doped and duped, and slowly took away India from the loose grasp of the pleasure-loving and innocuous princes and nabobs. When the British became powerful enough, they crushed the defiant when they could and coerced the hesitants after coaxing them first. The British lost America. England's army and navy fought heroically for their King, but could not contain the fierce will and moral stamina of the New Englanders. In India they faced no such opposition and the conquest was easy. But after the conquest they came to administer, putting forth their even stronger front, character, firm determination, administrative skill, and inflexible rule of law. Hence the Macaulays, the Trevelyans, the Elphinstones, the Bentincks, and the Cannings. Their missionaries, the Duffs and the Marshmans, undaunted by the accumulated horrors of heathenism and the 'depravity' of the Hindus, strove to redeem this fallen world with Christian messianism. But they succeeded only in creating Babus and 'brown sahibs', whose chatter of chi-chi English can still be heard in India among the scions of the rich, or the *nouveaux riches.*

The hopeful fact, after all, is that the inspiration that created the Indian Renaissance, the moral strength and character with which India fought the Empire and regained her self-esteem did not come from the British. These came from her own awakened soul, albeit catalyzed by the dynamic contact with the West. Not long after the time when the voice of Mangal Pande was silenced by an unerring British bullet, Bankim's *Bande Mātaram* quickened thousands of souls into a passionate devotion to the country. 'Mother India' was born. Not long after that, India's most glorious ascetic after Buddha, the *Karma-yogin* blessed of Ramakrishna, clad in the purest of saffrons, cried trumpet-voiced : 'My countrymen, do not forget that the lowly Indian, the ignorant Indian, the shoemaker Indian, the sweeper Indian are your brothers, your own flesh and blood. . . .' He told us that in order to be a nation, we must serve the nation, that service to mankind was the greatest religion, that there was no god without the god in every human soul—the most ringing cry from an ascetic that ever went to the soul of a nation. The greatest of poet sages, Tagore, picked up his trumpet and cried, 'Dishonour darkens your face, for centuries, O my country, would you not even then bow to the godliness of your fellowmen ? ' Tagore intoned : 'These pale and dumb mouths, these mute tongues must be given language. These broken hearts, these dry souls must be made melodious with hope. They have to be called in and addressed, "For heaven's sake, raise your heads high and stand together even for a moment." '

Realizing what man has made of man, Gandhi too took up the same trumpet and took it to the shacks of the outcasts and the downtrodden. Gandhi, like Vivekananda, touched the soul of India. The secret of that was an invincible faith in the moral regeneration of the nation. But by the time Gandhi's bullet-ridden body fell in Delhi, the moral vacuum was widening again along with the power vacuum. How can a nation survive without a moral conviction, a passionate ideal flowing like life-blood through its veins ? How can the ruled of yesterday learn to rule themselves today ?

There is many a doctor, many a nostrum. Some say, follow Russia. Some say, follow China. Some even say, follow

America. But who cares to know what foreign models *these* nations have followed to be where they are now?

A revolution does not grow in slogan chanting; it rots in bookish theories; it festers and runs in State policies. It can grow only in the mind, a mind undergoing a thought revolution. It is nothing if not a moral re-birth, a renaissance of the spirit. It is a contemplation not of the corruptibility of man, but of his perfectibility. From my direct knowledge of Socialist countries I know that political revolution has not added any appreciable moral grandeur to their people. I do not say that they are bad. They are in fact very good, but this goodness is not the result of political instruction. Their defects of character, their imperfections of social conscience have remained with them. It is not possible to correct a nation by violence, by punitive measures. The very instruments of correction would be weapons of oppression and would vitiate the whole body politic. But the average 'democratic' westerner, in spite of capitalism, industrial greed and urban dehumanization, has a moral dignity of his own that becomes immediately evident to a foreign visitor. In the one case, political revolution was not accompanied by a moral regeneration. In the other, a moral regeneration, coming in the wake of the European awakening of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, created a tremendous moral and intellectual fervour, which was the cause, and not the result of their political institutions. The Protestant revolution vindicated the basic rights of the individual, his social and political freedom, his right to exercise his own conscience and be its master: but it also asserted his duties. For every right, for every bit of freedom enjoyed by an Englishman, an American, or a Swede, there is a reciprocity on his part. In spite of the spreading infection of money and hedonism in the western societies, the built-in strength of the citizen's character still holds the society together.

The traditional social concord and its guiding moral principle have become almost dead in our society and we have not been able to resuscitate them. There are laws galore to force honesty, to stop cheating, to make the citizen behave in the ideal way. But when has virtue been the result of legal compulsion? There are hundreds of ways by which an Indian can get around the law and beat the system. An average Indian of today is a law-avoiding citizen, though there are the strictest of laws regulating everything. But laws are not laws unless they are enforced uniformly and universally. Besides, what law can move the bureaucrat whose most lasting instinct is to sit on his rotting files and harass the public. What law can make the several departments of the Government act in co-ordination, move the mail, the trains and buses and planes in time? What law can make the workers report to their duties in time, can make the doctors attend to their patients and the teachers come to their classes punctually? What law can make the examinations tests of merit, not rituals of falsehood? What law can make the selections of candidates for jobs just and equitable? What law can make law accessible to the common citizens without its proverbial delay? What law can make the law-enforcers enforce the law?

No laws of the State. To keep on adding clauses and sub-clauses in illegible fine print to the voluminous penal codes and ordinances of this country is a blatant act of defeat. No laws will save us, except the laws of decency, of charity, of tolerance, and unceasing attention to our *svakarma*, 'our-own duty'. No revolutions will succeed unless leavened by a moral drive, a moral imperative. Revolutions are born, not made. They are born in the soul of the society. I want to cling to my metaphor

and emphasize that no revolution will grow at the head of the society. We have for too long indulged in the idea that things are to be done from the top of the society not from below, by governmental actions, by political programmes from somewhere on a mystical height, not from the trodden earth, where the real stirrings of a nation's life can always be heard. That idea has to be reversed, and when we do that we will find that those at the top will be carried along by ground swells from below.

DR. KALYAN K. CHATTERJEE

(*Continued from p.* 71)

physics may well be asked from a polar view of reality. To realize the 'plane' in which positive and negative worlds merge, and then to somehow enter that totally other, negative mode, may well be the path to understanding nothingness. Therefore, we once again ask: What is the principle that separates essent from nothingness?

NOTES AND COMMENTS

IN THIS NUMBER

Questions and answers are from 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* translated by Swami Nikhilananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1947. References: Question 1, p. 764; Question 2, p. 780; Question 3, p. 781; Question 4, p. 839.

The words quoted in 'Onward For Ever!' are from *The Complete Works,* Vol. II (1963) pp. 218-9.

Meditation and *samādhi* are topics of discussion and publication from cloisters to classrooms, all over the world. The more they are discussed and written about, the more they seem to get befogged. Our attempt in this month's *Editorial* is to clear this fog and represent them as close to their original types as possible. To be sure, their essential contents remain always beyond words and the reaches of the unregenerate mind.

The timeless Truth is not only the substratum of all temporal phenomena but also a rare but regular 'participant' in them. When It becomes clothed in space-time garments, It becomes known to humanity as an 'incarnation of God'. A divine incarnation will shed his temporal vesture but his spiritual message, form, and inspiration persist and prevail with eternal relevance to changing conditions of time. Though he lived and taught in the nineteenth century, Sri Ramakrishna—a great manifestation of God in this age—as well as his life and message thus continue to be modern and contemporary.

'Sri Ramakrishna and the Modern World', by Swami Gambhirananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, is a thought-provoking article discussing the forward-looking approach of the great Prophet of Dakshineswar to the spiritual problems of man in our scientific and industrial era.

We hope our readers will appreciate this interesting essay in this month when Sri Ramakrishna's birthday will be celebrated in many parts of the world.

This article, incidentally, is the edited version of the Swami's Sunday lecture at the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, on 22 October 1972. We are indebted to our San Francisco Centre for the transcript of the tape recording.

The Upaniṣads, which are the basic texts of Vedānta, contain what are called the *mahāvākyas,* the great sayings, which are four in all. These sayings declare the perfect identity of the individual soul with Brahman or the Absolute Reality. *Tat-twam-asi* or 'That Thou art' is given the highest place among them, and it occurs in the sixth chapter of the *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* in the dialogue between Śvetaketu and his father Uddālaka Āruṇi. This chapter is, philosophically speaking, one of the profoundest parts of the Upaniṣad; and its essential teachings come out lucidly in the dialogue 'Śvetaketu, That Thou Art'.

A great amount of logical hair-splitting has been done by various schools of Indian philosophy, including the Buddhist and Jain schools, on nothingness and nihilism. Vedāntic thinkers and teachers of the non-dualistic school, however, take on the nihilists in many of their commentaries and treatises, in dialectical duels which are surpassing specimens of Hindu logical acumen. Though their insights into the nature of 'being' and 'non-being' are highly penetrative, the Vedāntic philosophers' prime concern is not in exploring the nature of nothingness for its own sake, but in reaching the substratum of Reality. They eliminate all superimpositions, mental and physical, on the absolute Reality, or Brahman, and establish Its non-dual nature. Their arguments are not mere intellectual gymnastics, but are ultimately based on higher experience and scriptural authority. Śaṅkara, the leading nondualistic seer-philosopher, refutes nihilism in many places in his commentaries on the Upaniṣads and *Vedānta-sūtras.* Incidentally he points out that 'nothingness' as such can never be posited or perceived because there always remain the 'substratum' of the nothingness and its 'perceiver'!

'Heidegger's "Essent" and the Concept of Polarity' by Louise McNertney and Dr. Grihapati Mitra, is a closely-knit thesis about the nature of 'nothingness'; but its conclusions differ from those of Vedāntic thinkers. The thesis and its conclusions, all the same, are stimulating and off the beaten track. Dr. Grihapati Mitra is the Chairman of the Department of Chemistry and Lecturer in Oriental Philosophy at King's College, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. He has published about forty scientific articles and numerous other essays in the fields of philosophy and sociology. Louise McNertney is an Honour Student and Mathematics Major at King's College.

'We are all boobies over there! Selfish cowards, with our nonsense of lip-patriotism, orthodoxy, and boasted religious feeling!' 'It was in India that unselfish and disinterested work of the most exalted type was preached but in practice *we* are awfully cruel, awfully heartless—unable to think of anything besides our mass-of-flesh bodies.' Both these statements, separated by a few months' time, were made by Swami Vivekananda, the most patriotic of our modern India leaders. The first is contained in a letter to Alasinga, a Madrasi disciple, from London, and the second in a letter addressed to Sarala Ghoshal, Editor of *Bharati,* written from Darjeeling. In both these letters Vivekananda has explicitly said what we Indians should do to overcome these defects. He has, moreover, pointed out in an interview

with *The Hindu* (Madras) what we need to learn from the English character: 'For instance, it is absolutely necessary for you, instead of frittering away your energy and often talking of idle nonsense, to learn from the Englishman the idea of prompt obedience to leaders, the absence of jealousy, the indomitable perseverance and the undying faith in himself.'

What Dr. Kalyan K. Chatterjee is trying to impress through 'The Moral Imperative' on the citizens of this land purports to what Swami Vivekananda taught us eighty years ago. Some readers might be tempted to judge Dr. Chatterjee as being a little too harsh in his criticism. But that is not true. This 'harshness' is very necessary, for our defects have become chronic and almost incurable. Dr. K. K. Chatterjee is the Senior Reader and Head, Department of English, Himachal Pradesh University, Simla. This is his first contribution to our 'Human Trends' and we hope it will be followed by many in future.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

VEDANTA-PARIBHASHA OF DHARMARAJA ADHVARINDRA, TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED BY SWAMI MADHAVANANDA, published by The Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur Math, fourth edition 1972, Pages xix+243, Price Rs. 6.00.

Vedanta-paribhasha is a compendium of Advaita Vedanta. The first six chapters deal with the six pramanas accepted by Advaita. These are followed by two chapters covering the subject matter and aim of Vedanta. The author follows the Vivarana school of Advaita. Swami Madhavananda's rendering appeared first in 1942. In thirty years there was the felt need for a fourth edition. This in itself clearly proves how the Swami could make a tough text easily intelligible. The rendering is simple and faithful. This text is a must for every student of philosophy.

DR. P. S. SASTRI

VIVEKACHUDAMANI with English translation of the Commentary of Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati of Sringeri: TRANSLATED BY P. SANKARANARAYANAN, Published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay-7, 1973, pp. xxi + 536, Price Rs. 23/-.

To bring the subtle truths of Advaita Vedanta home to ordinary readers, Sri Sankara has written many original poems, known as *prakarana-granthas*. Among these *Viveka-chudamani* occupies a pre-eminent place. As its name implies, it is literally the crest-jewel of discrimination. In enabling people to distinguish between what is real and what unreal, what is eternal and what evanescent, it is without a parallel. In its 581 verses it covers the entire ground of Advaita Vedanta and presents its doctrines in easily intelligible language. The exposition is in the form of a dialogue between an earnest disciple and an illumined preceptor. The entire work is in the nature of answers to the seven which the former addresses to the latter. By virtue of its dialogue form, lending a realistic touch to the exposition, and also by virtue of its apts illustrations to elucidate the subtle doctrines, this work of Sri Sankara has long remained with students of Vedanta a very favourite manual.

The only thing it lacked was an authoritative commentary. As if to add fragrance to a flower of gold, Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati, late Pontiff of Sri Sarada Pitha, Sringeri, has embellished it with a commentary comparable to the great commentaries of Sankara himself on the *prasthana-traya*, in respect of majestic expression and deep understanding

But this priceless commentary remained a closed book to most readers of *Viveka-chudamani*, since they had not sufficient knowledge of Sanskrit to follow it closely. This want has been removed by Sri P. Sankaranarayanan, retired professor of philosophy. His rendering of the original and the commentary into English is both faithful to the original and true to the genius of the English language.

The twenty-page introduction that he has written gives a lucid and succinct account of the entire teaching. The additional notes he has appended further enhance the merit of his translation.

We offer him our felicitations for accomplishing a colossal task with remarkable success. If, in spite of his age, he has been able to complete it successfully, it must be attributed to his deep faith in Advaita Vedanta and his reverence for the saintly commentator.

SRI M. K. VENKATARAMA IYER

NEWS AND REPORTS

THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, U.S.A.

REPORT For April, 1972—March, 1973.

Weekly Services: Swami Satprakashananda, the Minister-in-charge, conducted services on Sunday mornings and Tuesday evenings in the Society's chapel. Sundays he spoke on various religious and philosophical topics; Tuesdays he conducted meditation and expounded the *Bhagavad-gita*, questions being invited after the talk. On special occasions, devotional songs were sung; slides and coloured films were also sometimes shown. Besides members and friends, many came from other churches and from universities, colleges and schools. The Swami often met the students after services and answered their questions.

The lectures and discourses (including conducted meditation) were tape-recorded. During summer recess, regular meetings were continued, using these recordings. Several friends who could not attend the services came to listen to the tapes, by appointment; and individual devotees often used the duplicates in their homes. The Vedanta Society of Kansas City, Missouri, conducted their regular meetings with the use of these tapes.

Other Meetings: The first Thursday of the month, the Swami expounded *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* relating incidents from his personal knowledge of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and answering questions from the audience.

On April 30, 20 high-school students from a friendly Church Sunday-School came with their teacher, and heard a 'tape' on Hinduism; then the Swami met with them and answered a number of questions. A special meeting was held on May 12 in the library for the consolation of a bereaved Hindu family. On November 16, about 30 students of the High School of Belleville East, Illinois, who came with their teacher, were cordially received by the devotees, and had a discussion with the Swami based on their written questions. A special meeting was held on February 6, in the Chapel, for students of Oriental Philosophy at Washington University. 110 students came, with their teacher. They had read Rolland's *Life of Ramakrishna* and wanted to hear the Swami's reminiscences of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, including his teacher Swami Brahmananda. Later the teacher wrote the Swami a very appreciative letter.

Anniversaries: The birthdays of Krishna, Buddha, Sankara, Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, Vivekananda, and Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda and Shivananda were observed with morning devotions in the shrine and special services in the chapel. Other festivals such as Good Friday, Durga Puja, and Christmas Eve, were also duly observed.

Guest Swamis: On April 17, Swami Ritajananda, head of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of Gretz, France, was entertained for several hours at the Centre. Swami Nityabodhananda, head of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of Geneva, came on June 10, driving from Chicago; the next morning he spoke at the Sunday Service on 'Life, Love, and Death in the Upanishads'. Swami Adishwarananda of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York came to St. Louis on Friday July 7, and on Sunday spoke in the Chapel on 'The Role of Reason in Religion', leaving again that afternoon *en route* to Thousand Island Park. Swami Bhashyananda, head of the Chicago Centre, visited the Society from July 24 to 26th, speaking at the Tuesday service on 'Four Vital Questions of Life'. On August 1st, Swami Chetanananda, an assistant minister of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, spoke at the Tuesday evening meeting on how he had become interested in Vedantic teachings and entered monastic life. He left for Chicago on August 5th. Swami Gambhirananda, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, having come to this country for medical treatment, flew to St. Louis from Chicago on Saturday, October 7. Next morning he spoke in the Chapel on 'Sri Ramakrishna and His Message'; the following day he returned to Chicago.

Interviews and other activities: Throughout the year including the summer recess, the Swami received guests and visitors and gave interviews—to earnest aspirants as well as some who came for solution of personal problems. Approximately 250 interviews were given. About 150 guests and visitors from different states and countries were received, most of whom sought and obtained interviews with the Swami.

63 copies of *Methods of Knowledge* (by Swami Satprakashananda) were presented to universities in India. The Society's Library was well utilized. Mimeographed and printed sheets, cards, folders and pamphlets on Vedantic teachings were kept for distribution and were also mailed out on request.

MAHASAMADHI OF SWAMI SANTANANDA

With a heavy heart we record the passing away of Swami Santanandaji Maharaja at the Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta, on the 17th January 1974, at 8.21 a.m. He was 90. The cremation took place at the Belur Math on the Ganga. Swami Santananda was one of the senior trustees of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission.

He was born in 1883 in a respectable family at Howrah, and was known as Khagendranath Mullick in his pre-monastic life. Of a quiet nature he used to be seen meditating in lonely corners even as a boy. After passing out of school, he happened to learn from his close friend Jitendranath (later Swami Vishuddhananda, the eighth President of the Ramakrishna Order) about Sri Ramakrishna. He began frequenting Dakshineswar and other places connected with the Master in the company of his two friends, Jitendranath and Girija, whose acquaintance he made at Sri Ramakrishna Yogodyana, Kankurgachhi.

Imbued with intense dispassion, the three together decided to renounce the world and go out as mendicant monks. They accordingly started out in July 1907 for Puri. On their way they halted at Jayrambati to have the *darshan* of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, by whom they had previously been initiated. She also gave them the *gerua* robes and told them to go to Varanasi and stay at the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, where they could get the guidance of Swami Shivananda, one of the direct disciples of the Master. Khagendranath was given the name 'Santananda' by Mahapurush Maharaj, and later, in 1921, was formally initiated into *sannyasa* by Swami Brahmananda.

Given to intense spiritual practices, he spent most of his earlier life at Varanasi, though he frequently went on pilgrimage. He visited almost all the important pilgrimage centres in India.

In 1930 the Swami was appointed a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission. He was also made the Head of the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi ; but after a time he resigned the post and engaged himself in the worship at the shrine, which work suited his meditative temperament better.

Swami Santananda had to leave Varanasi in 1949 for treatment of tuberculosis and spent a few years convalescing at the Ramakrishna Mission T. B. Sanatorium, Ranchi. From 1963 he spent the remaining years of his life at the Belur Math. He bore calmly and without complaint the physical ailments that attended the last twenty years of his life.

The Swami was highly respected and loved for his spiritual attainments and sweet nature. His mind was evidently wholly given to the Master and the Holy Mother. His serene countenance attracted monks and devotees, young and old alike, and all felt a sense of peace and joy in his presence.

His departure leaves a void which is difficult to fill.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S BIRTHDAY

The birthday of Sri Ramakrishna falls this year on Sunday February 24th.

TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS

Dear Friend,

We have great pleasure in announcing below the names of LIFE SUBSCRIBERS enrolled since November, 1973.

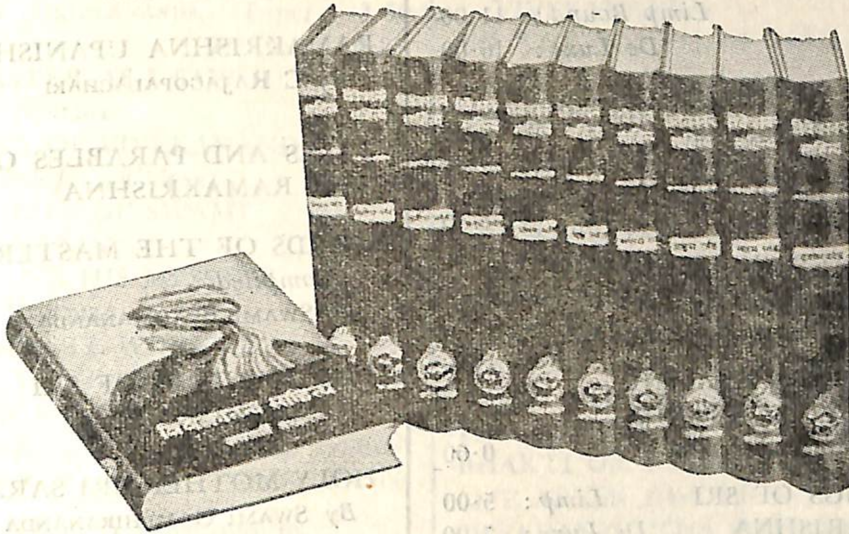
We cordially invite you to enrol yourself as a Life Subscriber and thus save yourself from the necessity of remitting the subscription annually. For rates of life subscription, please see title page.

The names of our life subscribers will be announced in *Prabuddha Bharata* from time to time.

Manager
Advaita Ashrama

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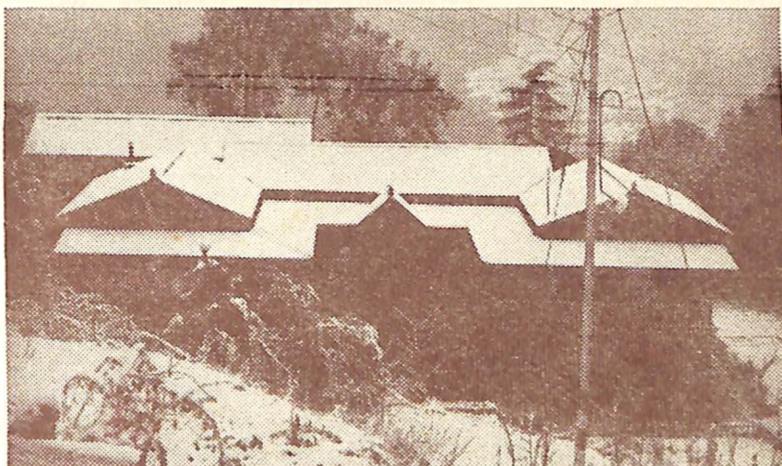


MAYAVATI CHARITABLE HOSPITAL

AN APPEAL

The Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati belonging to the Ramakrishna Order was started in 1899 under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda in the deep Himalayan regions near the northern frontier of India. The Mayavati Charitable Hospital forms a part of the Ashrama activities. It came into being as a small dispensary in 1903 in response to the crying need of the very poor villagers in neighbouring villages. Since then it has spontaneously grown through the years into a small well-equipped rural hospital of 23 beds, serving the needs of nearly 1300 villages within 20 miles radius. People come here for treatment from further distances also.

One unique feature of this hospital is that here patients get treatment and medicine completely free of charges of any kind.



Mayavati Charitable Hospital after a snowfall

To meet the increasing demand on its services the hospital needs more money. We appeal to generous-hearted people who feel for the suffering poor to make liberal donations. The hospital can be greatly helped by making endowments.

All contributions will be thankfully received and acknowledged. Crossed cheques and drafts may kindly be issued in favour of *Mayavati Charitable Hospital* and sent *only by registered post to :* The President, Mayavati Charitable Hospital, P.O. Mayavati, via Lohaghat, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P., India. *Donations are exempted from Income-tax in the hands of the donors, according to section* 80-G *of Indian Income-tax Act,* 1961, *vide I.T. Case No.* 11-029-AY-3086 / CAL/RC (A).

1st October 1973

Swami Budhananda
PRESIDENT

Editor : SWAMI BUDHANANDA, Joint Editor : SWAMI TADRUPANANDA
Printed by SWAMI SMARANANANDA at General Printers & Publishers (Pvt.) Ltd., 119 Dharamtolla St., Cal. 13 and Published by him for Advaita Ashrama (Mayavati) from 5 Dehi Entally Road, Calcutta 700014 *on February 1, 1974.*
Cover & Art Plates Printed by Sun Lithographing Co., Calcutta 10

Annual Subscription : India, Burma, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka - Rupees Eight, U. S. A. - Four Dollars.
Other countries £ 1·00, Single Copy : Inland - 75 P.

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